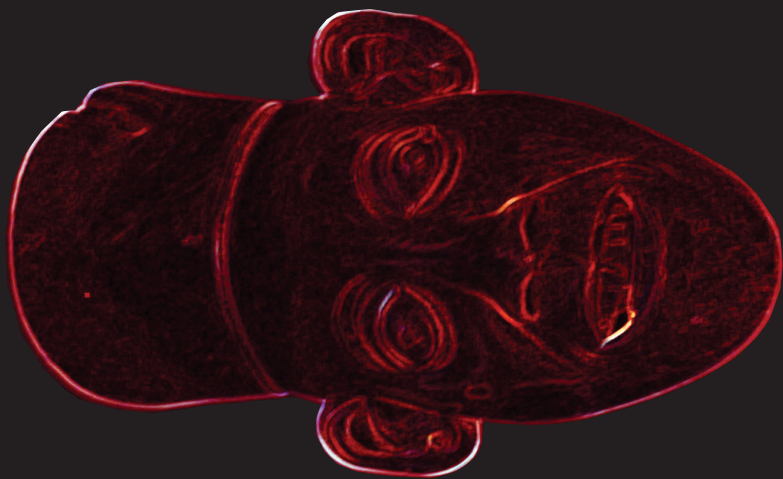


I Spit on their Graves

*Testimony Relevant to the
Democratization Struggle in Cameroon*



**Godfrey B. Tangwa
(Rotcod Gobata)**

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Dedication

To all victims, both living and dead, of the struggle for a better society, in Cameroon, Africa, and elsewhere in the world.

Foreword

Most African traditions recommend that only good should be spoken of the dead. That the living should wail when they depart. That the dead should be honoured. That the living should bring flowers to the graves of the dead in loving memory. So it must sound a bit strange (if not insulting) to tradition to find a book that celebrates the contrary view by inviting the living to bring, not flowers but spittle, to the final resting place of the dead.

The title of ROTCOD GOBATA's second book, *I Spit on Their Graves*, suggests that tradition may have either overlooked or discarded the possibility that not all corpses deserve praise.

Gobata invites us to spit in advance on the graves of those he sees as incorrigible evil doers, who, by their selfishness, have raped and plundered a most beautiful country. He ends his NO TRIFLING MATTER series with the single word NYAMFOKAH, a word pregnant with indignant connotation of values assessment within the traditional languages NYAMFOKAH is a wild animal which, in spite of its momentary wild stunts, is destined and good only for the soup pot. GOBATA sees the present rulership in Cameroon as destined only for the rubbish heap of history. By the grave, everything else pales into insignificance except the good that we did to our society.

Unable to detach his critical from his African self, Rotcod Gobata finds himself praying for those whose graves he seems to invite us to spit on in advance. "May God help him (Mr. Biya) to extricate himself from the Lilliputian Machiavellian characters, flatterers, liars, thieves and murderers who surround him." That prayer betrays the generalized hope among Cameroonians that those in power are convertible.

I Spit on Their Graves is masterful critical writing. It conveys with ferocious force the texture of life and politics in Cameroon. First published serially in the English language weekly *Cameroon Post* under the column NO TRIFLING MATTER, this collection of 50 essays captures the pulse of the Cameroonian nation which the Son-of-Gobata describes as “a democracy at the level of vocabulary alone.” He views Cameroon as a country about to lose its soul and go to its grave.

The Son-of-Gobata, echoing the view of the average Cameroonian, doesn’t believe a word of all what the Biya regime says of democratization. There is no shortage of incidents to justify his claim. Frank Biya (Mr Biya’s son) is escorted, he says, by government ministers when he visits a hospital at Christmas to distribute gifts - a sign that power in Cameroon is “misconceived in personal, monarchic and hereditary terms.” Insisting on the confusion that surrounds the notion of political alternance in Cameroon, he speaks of the Mr. Biya who declared himself a candidate at the flawed October 1992 presidential election but campaigned as president, turning his rallies into state visits.

Recognizing that errors could be made from the sheer lack of democratic experience, the Son-of-Gobata however could quip: “There is no democracy, young or old, in which it would be justifiable for the loser in any election to be declared the winner.” He is relieved that by admitting officially on this matter that errors were made, the Biya government agrees that “we can now erase infallibility from the official list of presidential attributes”.

Gobata is convinced that the more Mr. Biya has spoken about democratization the further we have been from it. He adds that although the regime’s Bible of democracy, *Communal Liberalism*, may be good, it was unfortunately “composed (in good faith) by François Sengat Kuo and signed (in bad faith) by you know who.” We mistake talk

about democracy for democracy itself, Gobata says, a bit like a child which mistakes a doll for a baby. For Gobata, Mr. Biya seeks to perpetuate himself in power by instituting a civilian-military diarchy in the country.

The more it looks like things are changing in Mr. Biya's "machine gun democracy," the more they remain the same. "It's all so much smoke and dust in the eyes." Gobata has nothing against dictatorship which he describes as a "viable form of government." What riles him is to see dictatorship "masquerading under democratic garb."

The Son-of-Gobata has won a reputation for speaking his mind and is, understandably furious that the rest of the nation remains in deep political slumber. The genesis of the problem, Gobata explains, is the fact that Cameroon had the misfortune of being colonized by France to which it remains indebted as "moyos" (in-laws).

Rotcod Gobata who once described himself as "a critic by nature and upbringing" hints that the nation of which he writes is led by men overtaken, as Nigeria's Zik was, by a "touch of premature senility" but who are mistakenly referred to sometimes as "gentlemen of gentility." He says of one of them (Prof. Augustin Kontchou) that he will "surely be remembered in human history as the first person to raise official lying to the status of a fine art."

Rotcod Gobata makes no secret of his distaste for the Biya regime. To the image of the regime being "an old battered car tottering along the highway in total disregard of the safety of its occupants and that of other road users" which he projected in his first book, *The Past Tense of Shit*, Gobata now adds and completes the picture in Book II with an image drawn from a typical African village. The regime, he says, is like a "stubborn jigger in the foot."

I enjoyed *I Spit on Their Graves* as much as I enjoyed *The Past Tense of Shit*. After reading that first collection of essays, I thought that it was a bright idea to collect these serialized

articles into books. I therefore, both hoped and wished that other columnists in the country would emulate the example. I have always thought that it is an injustice that we have done to history and posterity to have squandered what chances we had to comprehensively document assemble all that was ever broadcast on such reputed programmes as *Cameroon Report*, *Minute By Minute*, etc into books. By giving birth to Rotcod Gobata and by carefully collecting and republishing his articles in books, *Cameroon Post* has set a new standard worthy of our praise.

As you may have already suspected, I was pleased that the author elected to ask me to write the Foreword to this second collection of essays. I have enjoyed re-reading this collection of grisly, occasionally funny and entertainingly satiric stories. The fact that I share many of the author's viewpoints made my work easier although my over-charged programme did not allow enough spare time for me to complete the job within the delays the author requested. For this, I am deeply sorry.

I take this opportunity to salute the courage of the Son-of-Gobata and those who, like him, have vowed to use the mightiest sword ever invented - the pen -to bring about not only radical, but genuine democratic change in Cameroon. I hope that these columnists will succeed whatever their declared or undeclared ambitions are.

To Rotcod Gobata whose ambition is «to be a gadfly in our very transitional situation,» I say (pardon the cliché) more grease to his elbows and wish him luck, courage, as well as God's richest blessings and protection.

Ni John FRU NDI
May 1994.

Preface

I always keep my promises. You yourself can bear me out. A promise is a promise. A promise is a debt. Why promise if you don't intend to keep? The word "Shit" has not appeared on the title of this book. As I promised. Our situation has, however, not in any way improved or become in any sense less "shitty." Far from it. If anything, our situation has worsened beyond our most terrifying nightmares.

Hell must be a bottomless shit pit. Our descent into hell, which started in earnest with the "re-election" of Dr. Professor Paul Biya in October 1992, has continued gathering accelerated momentum and we don't seem to be hitting any rock bottom. Evil, pain and suffering have no intrinsic maxima.

I am keeping my promise to all those who, after the publication to which this present one is a promised follow-up, complained that I had chosen a really horrible and unfortunate title for an otherwise excellent collection of essays. I am keeping my promise to them that I would choose a more decent title for the present collection. The chances, however, are that, in the meantime, some of them might have learned, through empathy, sympathy or personal experience to say "*shit*" without squeaking or squirming. But I am keeping my promise to them, all the same. I am keeping my promise to Madam Roberta Jones, the former Director of the American Cultural Centre, Yaounde, who was unable to open the manuscript of THE PAST TENSE OF SHIT (Book One) on account of the title and who failed in her attempt in persuading me to change it. I am keeping my promise to Honourable Christopher Nsahlai, the Cameroon Ambassador to the Central African Republic. I presented him with an autographed copy of THE PAST

TENSE OF SHIT (Book One) and he frankly surprised me by frankly confessing that if he entered a bookshop and saw a book with such a title he could not bring himself to touch it. I am keeping my promise to all those who objected to, were offended by, or who in any other way felt uncomfortable with the first volume of this work.

I am keeping my promise to publish Book Two of THE PAST TENSE OF SHIT in spite of the fact that the first publication was a financial disaster borne by yours truly and a few friends and sympathizers. The bulk of the books were illegitimately and illegally seized by an illegitimate and illegal regime, without as much as a pretended reason. Efforts to recover them have, so far, proved naïve and frustratingly unproductive. Many a time have I been kicked in the butt. But, as Captain Peter Nasah advised me: “When you are kicked from behind, know that you are in front!”

We don’t keep promises because it is convenient. I am keeping my promise in spite of difficulties because I know the pain of unfulfilled promises. Just think of Dr. Prof. Biya’s empty promises—from the deep seaport in Limbe through the Bamenda ring road, to the relaunching of the economy, or even the more recent one in which he promised the whole nation in a New Year address that he would thenceforth start catching public thieves and embezzlers. How many has he caught so far? You are better placed to answer that yourself.

Since I stopped writing “NO TRIFLING MATTER” readers of CAMEROON POST have nearly drowned me with their complaints, queries, solicitations and pleading in spite of the fact that I had announced my intention to stop writing several times well in advance. Maybe people enjoyed reading what I was writing. But I was not writing simply to entertain. I am neither a journalist nor a novelist. Of course, I could jolly well try my hands at either or both. But that would be a different project altogether.

In “NO TRIFLING MATTER” I was simply trying to wake up Cameroonians from decades of dogmatic slumber. I was simply shouting to deeply sleeping and drowsy members of the household that there were armed robbers in the house. I wasn’t out to sing lullabies or hunt rabbits and grasshoppers. Well, after more than 3 years of shouting, we are all wide awake at last. But the robbers have carted away all the property. And set the house on fire. It is no longer for me to prescribe what is to be done. Shall we hunt the rabbits and grasshoppers escaping from the fires or shall we try the risky task of putting out the flames and tackling the job of reconstruction? It is no longer for me to say. There are more senior members of this household and I am impatiently waiting with other younger fellows to execute their suggestions and instructions.

There is nothing left for the son of Gobata to say that he has not already said. If you doubt this, carefully read through the 75 essays of *THE PAST TENNSEE OF SHIT* (Book One) and the 50 essays of *I SPIT ON THEIR GRAVES* (Book Two of the Past Tense...). The one and only son of Gobata is now, first and foremost, an ACTION MAN who may try his hands at journalism or novel writing only as time and circumstances permit. See you in the arena of action after you would have finished reading the essays as I have finished writing them.

Yours truly,

Rotcod Gobata

Djoungolo, Yaounde, 02/02/94

Acknowledgements

I sincerely thank the entire readership of CAMEROON POST and especially fans of my column “NO TRIFLING MATTER” for their encouragement which kept me writing, sometimes in spite of myself. My fan-mail file will remain one of my treasured souvenirs.

I am inexpressibly grateful to the following personalities for both moral and financial support: Mr. Martin JUMBAM, Mr. William S. TALLAH, Mr. Vincent MAINSAH, Mr. Buban NGU, Dr. George GEH, Mr. P.N. VEWESSE, Lawyer and Lawyer (Mrs) SENDZE, Mr. Lawrence TASHA, Justice NYO WAKAI, Archbishop Paul VERDZEKOV, Mr. Peter NGUFOR, Capt. & Mrs. Peter NASAH, Mola Njoh LITUMBE, Mr. Alex TAKU, Mr. Enoch TANJONNG, Mr. Sabastian DZEKASHU, and others I might have inadvertently overlooked.

I thank the staff, management and associates of the *CAMEROON POST* group of newspapers.

Le Cameroun c'est le Cameroun

Cameroun is Cameroon. When I was in High School, they used to call a statement of this form a “tautology or logical truth.” Any statement of this form has an informative content of zero. If I tell you that “A is A,” I have not told you anything; you are no wiser than you were before I spoke. In other words, uttering a tautology is as good as making an empty noise. This is a matter of logic. But in Cameroon we even defy logic. In Cameroon, the statement “Cameroon is Cameroon” is not an empty tautology. It is highly informative and significant. It is equivalent to another common expression: “L'impossible n'est pas Camerounais” which can be translated by stating that nothing is impossible in Cameroon. There is nothing so unlikely or improbable that it cannot happen in Cameroon.

The explanation for this odd state of affairs would seem to be related to the following facts. Variegated geologic and climatic conditions have made of Cameroon a mixed basket of valuable natural resources. Cameroonians, who are equally variegated culturally and linguistically, are an extremely friendly, hospitable and peace-loving people. But Cameroon had the singular misfortune of falling under the control of the most savage of European colonialists, the French, who for three decades have imposed the most ruthless dictators in the country. What is strange and what could not have happened elsewhere is the fact that this state of affairs has been accepted by Cameroonians, on the one hand, and completely ignored by the outside world, on the other. For nearly three decades, the only things that seemed

to interest Cameroonians were beer drinking, dancing and football fanaticism. It is scarcely three years since Cameroonians were aroused from their political slumber and they are not even fully awake yet. Until fairly recently, a whole year could pass without mention of Cameroon over world networks like the *BBC* and *Voice of America*.

The United States of America, the self-appointed and generally accepted policeman of the free democratic world, did not notice until quite recently that Cameroon has the worst Human Rights violation record in all of Africa. The U.S State department's report on human rights for 1991, published in February, 1992, describes human rights violations in Cameroon as "beyond description." And yet as recently as 1990, while we were shouting unheard from here, as the government unleashed a reign of terror at the University of Yaounde, the United States invited Mr. Biya and turned him into Doctor Biya by the award of an honorary degree in Agriculture. With such apparent backing and approval from such quarters, should we blame the man for adding arrogance to repressive dictatorship on his return?

When Dr. Biya made his infamous address to the National Assembly (June 1991) in which he threatened that "peace" would reign and that his own version of democracy would advance, I remarked in this column that it was only in Cameroon that a Head of State could get away with a speech like that (See "From La Democratie to Democracy" in CAMEROON POST, July 30-August 6, 1991). Before that, Dr. Biya had, during a state visit to France, openly and publicly declared that he was one of the best pupils of the French president. In another African country he would not have been allowed to return. A few years ago, some mischievous people circulated a false rumour in Nigeria that Babangida, the Nigerian Head of State, had a bank account in a foreign country. There were spontaneous riots all over Nigeria calling for his resignation. In Nigeria, government officials and public functionaries are not permitted to

operate foreign bank accounts. In Nigeria, if you are married to a foreigner you cannot work in the foreign or diplomatic service and if you work in the foreign or diplomatic service you cannot marry a foreigner. It makes perfect good sense. You don't take chances with "National Security." But in Cameroon, even our Minister of Foreign Affairs is married to a French woman. One of the presidential candidates in the recent fraudulent elections is reportedly also married to a French woman. Which means that we came very close to the possibility of having a French woman as our first Lady. If without this being the case the situation between Cameroon and France is the way it is, I leave you to imagine for yourself how things would look like if we further become indebted to France as "*moyos*" (in-laws). I have travelled in Africa. There is no other African country with a capital city in such a filthy and dilapidated state as Yaounde. There is no other African country the state of whose roads, decades after independence, is as indescribably bad as in Cameroon. And yet there is no other African country as rich in resources as Cameroon. And yet again there is no other African country (with the possible exception of Mobutu's Zaire) which can boast that its citizen *numéro uno* has real estate property in France, Switzerland, Germany, Florida, Beverly Hills etc. and coded bank accounts in the Bahamas and in Switzerland. There is no other African country where people who are known by everybody to be liars, murderers or thieves are ministers. But then, "Le Cameroun, C'est le Cameroun." When Le Cameroun shall cease to be le Cameroun, we shall, in one grand symbolic action, first choose a new capital, as I suggested before, then change the name of the beloved triangle to Nooremac (with acknowledgement to the Rambler) or simply to "Njanga" which, as you very well know or ought to know, is what exactly is meant by "Cameroon."

Published December 9-16, 1992

Boycott All Boycottables

Did you know that there are no political detainees or prisoners in Cameroon? Did you know that all the people being detained in Bamenda and the rest of the North West Province are common law criminals and suspects? Did you know that torture is completely unknown in Cameroon and that His Lordship the Archbishop of Bamenda is an irresponsible liar for raising a false alarm about torture in Cameroon? Did you know that Cameroon democracy is the best in the world and that our international image and reputation has been greatly enhanced and strengthened following the last presidential elections? Did you know that Archbishop Desmond Tutu came here as a sceptic but left as an ardent convert of the Biya-regime?

The state of emergency must have been imposed to help the people of the North West Province take a well deserved rest from their excessive hard work, Ngwa Che Ghandi must have died as a result of excessive kindness and pampering! If you don't know all the above "facts" then you certainly have not been listening lately to his holiness (copyright dues to Luke Ananga), the omniscient Minister of State for Communication, Augustin Kontchou, alias Zero Mort.

It is not so long ago since I predicted in this column that, if care was not taken, we might soon be calling white black, black white, worshiping the Devil and calling God Satan. Our silence before Kontchou's outrages shows that the prediction has already come true. Some people only laugh and say that one of these days Kontchou would end up, like some others of his ministerial colleagues, in a mental hospital. What many people don't perhaps know is that

mental illness may take a very long time before blossoming in outright insanity. And where would we all be in the meantime? Frederick Nietzsche, who played a similar role for Hitler's Nazi regime, continued in like manner and even wrote brilliant philosophical treatises until the very end of his life before full-blown insanity intervened. Hitler himself continued in a state of containable madness until he committed suicide. One clear indication that undiluted insanity had caught up with him by the end of his life is the fact that he insisted on a solemn wedding ceremony with his mistress, Eva Braun, only minutes before both of them committed their pre-meditated suicide. But then, of course, the protracted time lapse might have been due to the climate. Cold climate always helps to cool down madness. Or didn't you know that? If you have a mad relative and can afford it, send him/her to a very cold country, like Norway.

Many of those wielding dictatorial power over us, without our mandate and against our will, are moral lepers. Some of them have committed atrocious crimes. Others, for personal gain, have subverted and fought against the real interest and collective well-being of their own communities. All of them have constituted themselves into a formidable gang with enormous resources at their disposal. Their methods of operation go from cajolery through intimidation and blackmail to repressive terror. We are like hostages before their power and might. When we attempt peacefully to demonstrate our collective disapproval, they forcefully disperse us with canons, tear-gas, hand-grenades and bullets. What non-fatal methods of protest and struggle are open to us?

I suggest that we should ostracize and boycott all these moral lepers. We should stop shaking hands with them. Let us not be seen at their sumptuous banquets and bacchic feasts. Because of the hard times, this may not be easy but it is necessary. For how long shall we continue feeding on crumbs and left-overs when we also have the right to a place

on the banquet table? I prefer to die of starvation with dignity than to be contemptuously fed by a moral leper. Let us stop kowtowing before them and addressing them Monsieur le this and that.

Those who frequent my favourite Bat at Djongolo can bear me out. The son Gobata has since reduced his attendances to once a week. That is what I can still afford. And if necessary I will further reduce it to zero times a week. And if anyone is inviting me to come and feast and drink free beer and champagne I will refuse. If he is calling and beckoning frantically, I will not even turn to look; I will just stride away in dumb show. I don't traffic with moral lepers whose selfishness and deliberate madness has ruined a most beautiful country and subverted our future well-being.

Our boycott of their French masters and mentors is already having a significant effect after only two weeks. We must reinforce this. So, please, don't touch any Brasseries du Cameroun drinks. Don't linger around a TOTAL petrol station for anything. Don't be seen around SCORE or MONOPRIX shops. Don't use Maggie cube with the star; njangsa and dawadawa and akangwa are even much better. Boycott all French businesses and services. Boycott all Cameroonian businesses and services which are known or suspected to be mere fronts for French interests. Boycott all French people. Don't sell to or buy from them. They are not satisfied with having exploited us for half a century. They are sponsoring our extermination so that Cameroon can remain their farm forever.

In boycotting, you take no risks and you run no risks. So even if you are a coward, as many Cameroonians have proved to be, you can join the peaceful passive resistance method of boycott to fight for your own interests. So I would recommend one single resolution to all Cameroonians for New Year 1993: **BOYCOTT ALL BOYCOTTABLES!**

Published December 16-23, 1992

Tribute To Professor Gabriel Obenson

Tuesday, December 1st 1992. The man died. Suddenly, unexpectedly. He died in a “motor accident” fifty kilometres to Yaounde on the Douala-Yaounde highway. A few hours before, he had telephoned someone at INTELCAM, Yaounde, to announce his imminent arrival. He never arrived. A few days before, precisely on 19th November, he had delivered a powerful lecture on the theme: “The Foundations of a Modern Cameroon Nation” at the American Cultural Centre, Yaounde. The son of Gobata was among the audience that listened to him and other speakers that day. I even managed to secure a typed copy of his lecture at the end of the occasion. The occasion was organized by the Bernard Fonlon Society (B.F.S.) under what it termed “The 5th Bernard Fonlon Annual Lecture.” The occasion was so popular that even CENER agents attended. Four days after Obenson, on Saturday 5th December, the Vice President of the Bernard Fonlon Society also died. Suddenly, unexpectedly. Of a “heart attack.” It is only then that we started asking if Obenson’s accident was really accidental. But he had already been collected and buried without any suspicion. So the answer to our belated question will continue blowing in the wind.

At his 19th November Fonlon Lecture, I was meeting Professor Gabriel Obenson personally for the second time. The very first time was only two weeks earlier although I had been hearing about him for nearly two decades and had

in fact devoted an entire edition of NO TRIFLING MATTER to him in 1991. In Anglophone circles, he is well known, respected and talked about as an aerial surveyor and expert geophysicist. For over 15 years, he was Professor of Soil Science in one of Africa's most prestigious Universities, the University of Lagos, Nigeria. He had considerable experience in University administration. That is why, after my first face-to-face meeting with him, scarcely a month before his death, I had made a mental note that, if the University of Buea ever came to be, he would be my own choice for the post of Executive Head and Vice Chancellor. By the way, West Cameroonians must decide for themselves the "to be or not to be" of the Buea University and proceed to create and develop it from their own resources. I am tired of repeating in this column that the Biya regime has no intention of creating a University at Buea or anywhere else, for that matter.

Back to Professor Obenson. When I met him for the first time, it was in the company of some University lecturers. I didn't have the chance to let him know that I was the Gobata who had written about him in the *CAMEROON POST* of November 20-27, 1991. But I did ask if he was the writer of some poems I had usually read on the literary page of *CAMPOST*. In his highly humorous manner which I had remarked from his writing in my 1991 piece, he answered that the author of the poems was a brother of his but that he himself was seriously considering writing some poetry so that he could earn the title "writer." We all laughed and he explained that even though he had written several scientific books, no one has ever called him a writer whereas anyone with a single literary work can be called a writer. He then informed us, amidst ohs and ahs and ehs, that the late Tataw Obenson of Ako-Aya fame was his senior brother and that literary talent seemed to have a genetic foundation in the family.

What first attracted my critical attention about Professor Obenson was a short article of his on Lake Nyos, published in CAMEROON POST of October 24-31, 1991. Tinged with subtle humour, this article accurately laid its finger on what I considered to be “the trouble with Cameroon,” namely, the enthronement and worship of mediocrity. Although he was a rare expert in the field, it did not occur to the Cameroon government to include Prof. Obenson in the team investigating the Lake Nyos disaster.

Ironically, one of the foreign agencies interested in the disaster hired him as its consultant. The government has further shown a suspicious lack of interest in the results of the investigation, lending credence to the hypothesis that the disaster was in no way natural. Since le Cameroun is le Cameroon, this hypothesis still stands to be falsified.

If Dr. Paul Biya, who was once crowned Fon of Fons in Bamenda, of whom the Holy Family Choir of Tabenken, in their grammatical confusion, once eulogized as “a gentleman of gentility” were close to his people, he would surely know that any average Cameroonian in the North West Province could claim to have good reason to believe that His Excellency wants genocide in the province. After Lake Nyos, there was the surreptitious attempt to sterilize young girls under the guise of some nameless vaccination, which was uncovered a few years ago. And then there is the state of emergency which, as Kontchou explained, was conceived as the first step towards the “state of exception.” Today there is increasing talk about lifting the state of emergency. There is no good reason to lift the state of emergency because there was no good reason to impose it. Lifting it would be as arbitrary as imposing it.

Sorry for the digression. I was paying tribute to the Late Professor Obenson. Prof. Obenson, in his Fonlon lecture, prescribed clear and pragmatic measures to get Cameroon out of the present socio-politico-economic impasse.

According to him, the challenge of a good and democratic government is “how to most efficiently use knowledge that is abundantly available in the country irrespective of the political affiliations of those who have it.” He further warns: “To remain as one country we should say again and again loud and clear that all those in power now should call off their bluff and stop acting patronizingly as if Cameroon is their private property.”

Among his many specific recommendations were the following:

- The number of ministries should be reduced to eleven.
- Government parastatals including SONEC, SNEC, CRTV should be privatized.
- A National University Commission should be set up to handle the Universities of Yaounde, Buea and Ngaoundere following the demise of the University Centres.
- Radio and Television broadcasts should be on two different channels for English and French programmes, respectively.

Obenson may no longer be with us but his patriotic suggestions are staring us in the face.

Published December 23-31, 1992

Christmas in “Baghdad”

When I left Yaounde for the North West Province (to see things for myself) a few days before Christmas, many people were optimistically predicting that the state of emergency would be lifted before Christmas day. Their reasoning was that His Excellency, who imposed the state of emergency, is a devout Catholic Christian. (In 1984 everyone saw him receiving holy communion from the hands of His Holiness himself). It is also well known that, for Anglophone West Cameroonians, Christmas is the greatest feast of the year. Some people were therefore thinking that His Excellency, who is the president of all Cameroonians “sans exclusive” and who is always talking of reconciliation and peace, might surely decide to lift the state of emergency in time to allow the people of the North West to celebrate Christmas. What these people were forgetting is that a devout Christian might also be an initiate of the order of Rosicrucians and that, while it may be easy to impose a state of emergency, it may not be so easy to find an excuse to end it. The Biya regime is evidently still searching for a face-saving excuse to lift the state of emergency. We understand that the Fons of the North-West have refused to play Zombie again by going to Unity Palace to plead on their knees, “on behalf of their people,” that His Excellency should perform (once more) one of his acts of gratuitous magnanimity. If Fon Angwafor III of Mankon goes alone, he cannot speak for the entire North West and will not be convincing (to the CRTV cameras). The primary purpose of the government-sponsored and orchestrated violence and the imposition of

the state of emergency is not far to fetch. The main purpose of all the theatrics and acrobatics is to divert people's minds and attention from a very ugly fact, namely, that Dr. Paul Biya did NOT win the October 11th Presidential elections. Now all attention and concern has been shifted to the mass arrests, detentions, lootings, torture and the safety of the charismatic leader, Ni John Fru Ndi. The elections are no longer the point of contention. Now people are only begging for the right not to be killed or tortured and Fru Ndi is only begging for the right to go out of his own house. By the time Ni John Fru Ndi is released from house arrest and the state of emergency is lifted, we will all be so happy that we will forget the fact that the overwhelming majority of Cameroonians voted Dr. Paul Biya out of office on October 11th 1992. You can call this "prescribed collective amnesia."

But from what I experienced in the North West during my "short private visit," which lasted from 20th – 27th December, I am quite sure that even if the drug is effective in other parts of the country, it will not work in the North West. As a critic by nature and upbringing, I used to take myself for a radical. But in the North West I really felt like a conservative wherever I went. When an old woman was told that I was from Yaounde she asked me: "How are you people breathing in Yaounde?" I missed her sense of humour and was at a loss what to answer, so she pursued: "I thought you people said that when you breathe in Yaounde then the whole country is alive. Now I can see that the whole country is dying. So I am wondering how you people are breathing in Yaounde." I was tongue-tied. I was with friends at a drinking place when Frank Biya, trailed by several ministers, passed on the television screen, distributing gifts to the wretched of the earth in the hospital, the way Mrs. Jeanne Irene Biya used to do every Christmas when she was alive. Someone immediately asked if Frank Biya was also a member of the Biya government and another wanted to

know if Christmas charity is a family business. Mrs. Biya used to distribute gifts to handicapped and sick children in her capacity as First Lady. This is the standard practice in many countries. It is a symbolic action by which the state demonstrates its concern for the sick and disabled. Now that Mrs. Biya is no more, and Dr. Biya, has not officially remarried, by what logic is Frank Biya, Mrs. Biya's adopted son, performing the duties of a First Lady? The only reason is that power is being misconceived in personal, monarchic and hereditary terms. You could see from the faces and attitude of the ministers who accompanied Frank Biya in his philanthropic Christmas ceremony that they considered themselves as mere courtiers in the presence of the veritable crown prince. Dr. Biya himself seems incapable of thinking of himself as anything other than "president of all Cameroonians." Even though he had declared "JE SERAI CANDIDAT" when he called the precipitated presidential elections, he was never a candidate even for one moment. He remained president all the time and made his campaign tours under the guise of "state visits" and his campaign speeches under the pretext of "addresses to the nation." All this shows how far we are from democracy and how close to monarchic autocracy. After Christmas, comes NEW YEAR. Experience has taught us to tinge our optimistic expectations with a healthy dose of scepticism. That is why all we dare to hope for on New Year's Eve is that the regime would renounce violence and torture and lift the meaningless state of emergency in the North West Province.

Published December 29, 1992

Two Honourable Options

The state of emergency in the North West Province has been lifted after two months. What did it achieve? Less than nothing. To say that the state of emergency achieved nothing is to imply that the government which imposed it came out of it with no gains and no losses. The state of emergency achieved less than nothing because the government came out of it completely worsted, much weaker and less credible than it went in. The state of emergency was, no doubt, calculated to subdue the rebellious populations of the North West, destroy or weaken the charismatic power of Ni John Fru Ndi and consolidate Dr. Biya's dubious "victory" at the October 11th elections. But the palpable truth is that the state of emergency has only further galvanized, radicalized and strengthened the people of the North West. Chairman FRU NDI has come out of the state of emergency more charismatic, more consistent with himself, more extremely popular, and simply credible. Who knew before the state of emergency that, isolated from all his advisers, the "bookseller" could display on all impromptu occasions such a perfect mastery of our socio-politico-economic situation? Let any other pretender to the supreme magistracy, who feels equal to the Chairman in these regards, step forward. Since May 1990 when he launched his SDF, Fru Ndi has made no political mistakes. A truly remarkable fact.

Even some of the elements of the armed forces, carefully selected to teach the North West a bitter lesson, caught the Freudian epidemic and from time to time reportedly passed very sensitive and strategic information to the "enemy." It

is rumoured that it was such information which enabled the populations to mobilize in time to prevent the removal of the Chairman to Yaounde between the 27th and 28th of December. Failure to get him further led, according to the same sources, to the outright release of the 137 “common law criminals” who had been variously discharged or freed on bail by the Bamenda High Court but moved, under cover of darkness, to the political prison in Yaounde. This last action was perhaps one of the greatest blunders of a regime that is no longer ashamed of blunders.

If the state of emergency achieved anything, it was to give some people the opportunity to settle personal scores with the likes of Che Ngwa Gandhi (R.I.P.). Those who tortured him to death are alive and well. One day we will hear the whole story from their own very mouths. After all, one of the murderers of Rev. father Anthony Fontegh, who died recently, reportedly let the cat out of the bag about the Rev. Father’s death before dying. Which means that, with the co-operation of the other murderers, we may soon know how, why and by whose commission the man died.

One day, the mysteries surrounding the deaths of Barrister Bouopda, Lawyer Ngongo Ottou, Rev. Father Mbassi, Bishop Plumey, Cameroon’s latest First Lady, the two Djoum Reverend Sisters etc., would be dissolved.

The state of emergency, like the precipitated presidential elections themselves, was a calculated blunder which achieved negative and opposite results. The declared purpose of the precipitated elections was to enhance peace, unity and security and to strengthen the confidence of foreign investors, money lenders and donors in Cameroon. How do we stand today with regard to these objectives? The answer is blowing in the wind!

In his New Year address, “L’Homme Lion,” looking more like a subdued lamb, comes close to frankly admitting these blunders when he remarks that errors may have been made. Although, from the point of view of message and content,

the address was the same old pointless rambling that we are quite familiar with, it achieved a radical breakthrough with regard to style and comportment. Gone were the usual frantic gestures, the attitudinal arrogance and fidgety pugnaciousness epitomized in the June 1991 address before the National Assembly. No trace also of the provocative rhetorical questions, outright mockery and flat humour characteristic of the October 1992 Monatele address. Gone too was the theatrical self-confidence. In the New Year address, we saw a pleading president.

If the admission of errors is an indication that we can now erase “infallibility” from the official list of presidential attributes, then we have really made some progress. But the special pleading on the ground that our “democracy” is still too young and too recent must be taken with a healthy pinch of salt. Compared to the so-called older democracies, it is true that we still have to build or consolidate the foundation and pre-conditions of democracy: a free and vibrant press, mass literacy, respect of human rights and sundry freedoms, especially freedom of expression, association and assembly, the rule of law, etc. But there is no democracy, young or old, where it would be justifiable for the loser in any election to be declared the winner.

The October 11 precipitated presidential elections were really *sans objet*. I believe that Dr. Biya is legitimately completing his previous presidential mandate which will end in March 1993. After that, two honourable options are open to him: (a) Hand over to the legitimate president elect, Ni John Fru Ndi or (b) Organize fresh elections, including presidential elections. May God help him to extricate himself from the Lilliputian Machiavellian characters, flatterers, liars, thieves and murderers who surround him, so that he can cool and clear-headedly consider these honourable options. Amen!

Published January 7-4, 1993

The Wolves Finally Discard Their Sheep's Clothing

A wolf may go about in sheep's clothing. But a wolf in sheep's clothing may not succeed in deceiving all the people all the time that it is a sheep. Some people do not judge by the clothing, by appearances. Such people will always know that a wolf in sheep's clothing is a wolf and not a lamb. A wolf in sheep's clothing must, of necessity, take off its false clothes from time to time, to take it bath, for example. At such moments wise and observant people catch the wolf out and know thence forth that they are dealing with a wolf in sheep's clothing and not a sheep of wolfian proportion. A wolf may wear sheep's clothing for a long time but finally it must, of necessity, discard its false clothing and come out in its true form and colours. For how long can a leopard conceal its spots?

By 1982, hardly anybody (with the possible exception of the likes of Alexandre Biyidi alias Mongo Beti and Ateba Yene alias Zero Vivant) knew that Biya Bi Mvondo was a wolf in sheep's clothing. The rest of us mistook him for a "gentleman of gentility" whom God, in his mercy, had sent to deliver us from Ahidjo's tyrannical dictatorship. By 1986, many of us already knew the fact but the rest of Cameroonians did not believe us when we started whispering the truth to them. By 1986, when some of us dared to say that Biya had completely destroyed the Cameroonian economy, we were nearly stoned like a woman caught in adultery in Iran. Even Ahidjo's sobs from exile that the Cameroonian economy which he had built up and jealously

protected was recklessly being destroyed by his “deceitful” successor went unheard. Biya himself arrogantly assured the nation: “*Le Cameroun se porte bien.*” Frequent cabinet reshuffles, prefectorial and directorial chess-game-like appointments, had by now placed his cronies (blood relations, tribesmen and classmates) in virtually all strategic public positions in the country. The systematic cleaning out of the national treasury which had begun timidly in 1984 reached its apogee in 1986. The imminent arrival of the bill, in the form of draconian measures was announced on New Year’s Eve 1987 with a furtive “*L’année 1987 sera difficile!*”

By 1987, Paul Biya was still smiling very charmingly and few people smelt any rat with the above announcement of the shape of things soon to come. From 1987, the wolf-in-sheep’s-clothing started taking off his clothes occasionally to take his bath. But many Cameroonians, like congenital idiots, still did not recognize him for a wolf. Some clearly saw the king stark naked but pretended that the king was robed in purple and velvet.

By 1990, many Cameroonians who were seeing clearly but unable to lie to themselves, unable to pretend and equivocate, unable to call black white, decided that enough was enough. They came together under the leadership of a common bookseller and launched a mass movement for change. A “lamb” roared like a wolf and bared its teeth which were to be seen frequently in the two years following. But the real fun is that many people still did not recognize the wolf and continued believing and proclaiming that the wolf was a lamb. Some who knew him to be a wolf and who also knew themselves to be wolves thought of replacing him. But when this proved impossible, they joined him to form a pack of wolves.

By 1992, the wolf-in-sheep’s-clothing no longer had any need for the sheep’s costume. He discarded it completely and came out in his stark nakedness to proclaim that he is

not even only a wolf but a lion, ready to devour everything on his way. The real fun again is that some people still did not take the lion seriously. Maybe they thought he was only rehearsing a Christmas play or something. Others took him seriously but thought that it was “we—others” or, at worst, their next door neighbours only that were going to be devoured. But with the lion’s first outings out of its lair in 1993, no one can still be in doubt that all of us are equally in danger. This is the warning that some of us had tried unsuccessfully for years to impress on Cameroonians. Those of us who were already early preys of the marauding lion can only lie down now and laugh at Cameroonian civil servants who thought they were a specially select group headed for heaven on our backs in the lion’s train.

Welcome, Ladies and Gentlemen, from the land of beatific illusions to the world of stark realities. Welcome to Cameroon in 1993. At long last we are going to see things clearly from a common perspective. We will all soon be able unanimously to agree that a democracy which remains only at the level of vocabulary is no democracy at all. We will soon be able to take our collective destiny within our own hands. We will all soon be agreed that we are all doomed if we don’t change things in our collective favour. To live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often. We will soon be agreed that good government is the essential thing even if the fellow at the helm is not your tribesman. Luckily for us, most of the fake new messiahs, wolves in sheep’s clothing, have already revealed themselves. Our way is now clear before us. The Promised Land is just across the river. So let’s all get registered *today* on the electoral lists so that we can arrive there in resounding form and style despite the roughness of the journey.

Published January 13-20, 1993

Bello Bouba is Bouba Bello

I have once compared the Biya regime to an old battered car tottering along the highway in total disregard of the safety of its occupants and that of the other road users. It seems surely headed for the ditch with every passing day as it multiplies its blunders. But, so far, it has exhibited near miraculous tenacity and survivability. How can this situation be explained? How has the Biya regime managed to continue hanging on to power against the unequivocal will of the overwhelming majority of Cameroonians and in spite of its suicidal blunders? The answer is blowing in the wind and your guess is as good as mine.

In my own guess, the answer lies partly in the regime – in its *modus operandi* which includes cajolery, bribery, coercion, blackmail, intimidation, obstruction, elimination and bold-faced lying; partly in the complacency and naivety of Cameroonians; and partly in elements like the Maigari factor.

Let us briefly look at the Maigari factor in the present scheme of things. During the electioneering campaigns for the ill-advised October 11th Presidential elections, I often heard it said that Bello Bouba Maigari was propelled by secret motives for revenge. I observed very carefully but I never found any evidence for this charge although some young female U.P.C. militant kept asking me if I couldn't clearly see it from his steadily staring unblinking eyes. I replied that I knew no art by which to read the mind from the construction of the face and that that was why I was reluctant to draw any conclusions from Anta Gassagay's furtively shifty eyes. She said she would prefer voting even

for a joker like Gustave Essaka than voting for Maigari. I replied that she must have some deep-seated prejudice but that that was also part of the democratic game.

Throughout the campaign period, weightier issues prevented this column from taking up the Alhaji. One such missed opportunity was after someone called Ngobising Suh Romanus squandered several minutes of precious air time telling us that we should vote for Maigari because he was a man he (Romanus) knew very well, a man he had lived with, worked with, a man he had tested and tried, a man of his words, etc. I thought Suh Romanus should be asked how he expected us to take Maigari on his word when we didn't even know him (Romanus). To accept Maigari as a man of his word on Romans' word, we needed first to know Romanus as a man of his own word. The tendency to sing the personal virtues of the presidential candidate was very much evident in the U.N.D.P. & C.D.U. campaigns and I think that this went a long way in preventing the emergence of a unique opposition candidate. Nearly all C.D.U. campaigners kept chanting that Adamu Ndam Njoya was the only bridge across all rivers – between the North and South, East and West, young and old, black and white, Christians and Moslems, Anglophones and Francophones etc. etc. They really overdid it.

It is in the post electoral period that Maigari really came out in his true colours and exhibited unbelievable political weaknesses. When the regime in power set in motion its rigging machinery, French ambassador, Yvon Omnes, the guardian angel of the Biya regime, was commissioned to work on Bouba Bello. Some independent newspapers got wind of this and went to the market with the story that the U.N.D.P. was planning an alliance with the C.P.D.M. The story was emphatically denied as an attempt to denigrate and blackmail the Alhaji. The French strategy was to explain to Bouba Bello their plans to eliminate or neutralize Fru Ndi and to assure him (Bello Bouba) that he would be next in line after Paul Biya. This might explain why after the

proclamation of the fraudulent results by the Supreme Court, Bello Bouba declared that, although the elections were full of irregularities, he had accepted them “in the interest of peace.” No political leader worth his salt can make such a statement. Admitting irregularities is incompatible with accepting the result.

Then came the sharing of the spoils. Bello Bouba was once more outsmarted. While he was still negotiating the conditions of the alliance with the ruling regime, the new cabinet was announced and two of his militants, each of whom could rival his leadership of the party, were given ministerial portfolios without his knowledge and/or consent. Reports say Bello collapsed twice and had to be revived. Then the guardian angel went to work again. Bouba was made to say that the U.N.D.P. had not (yet) signed any accord with the Biya regime and that the two militants of his party in the Biya government were not representing the party. If they are militants of the party, how can they defy the will of the party so flagrantly and get away with it? If Bello Bouba is incapable of running a simple party, how would he be able to run the whole country if he were elected president?

Bello Bouba may be a good technocrat. I don't know. But he has not cut the image of a good politician, much less of a presidential aspirant. One indispensable quality of a good politician is prompt reaction to important events. When the state of emergency was imposed on the North West Province and Ni John Fru Ndi sequestered in his house with nearly 200 people, Bouba Bello, as the next most important opposition figure, kept mum. After one whole month, when he had himself got into problems, he belatedly and unconvincingly called for the lifting of the state of emergency. I'm afraid, unless Bouba Bello joins the “Union for Change” now, we may be justified in dismissing him with the tautology: Bello Bouba is Bouba Bello.

Published January 19-27, 1993

Something Pass You Why You No Leave Am?

Biya Bi Mvondo, Doctor of Agriculture, *honoris causa* (Eastern Shores) will surely be remembered in contemporary history as the person who brought social, political and economic CHAOS to Cameroon. During the precipitated presidential electioneering campaigns, the word “chaos” was never far from his mouth. On several occasions he painted the spectre of chaos if he did not win the elections. He did not win, but sat tight. Now his prophecy has been fulfilled. The whole country is in a state of chaos in all domains.

The fundamental fault of the New Deal regime is the instauration of mediocrity backed by total lack of morality and even common decency as a national philosophy. But even fundamental errors are forgivable. What cannot be forgiven is the insistence to hang on to power by all means at any cost, the refusal to quit the stage when the show is clearly over. As some taxi-driver in Yaounde put it recently: “Something pass you why you no leave am?” All human beings have limitations. Wise people know their limitations. Some people such as mediocres do not know their limitations and depend on harsh experience to teach them. But we should expect them to accept these limitations once experience has demonstrated them. What is incomprehensible is the refusal to accept what experience has clearly proved.

Dr. Biya, demonstrably, does not know the art of governing. Even children know this fact today. Why doesn't he try his hands at something else, such as teaching agriculture in an American University, for example? But, from all indications, he seems really to believe that he can adequately cover up his glaring limitations with frauds, lies, intimidations, repressions, cajoleries, bribes and corruptions. All these, as methods of governing, have their limitations. For over a decade now, Biya has never stopped talking about "la democratie," "la paix" and "relance de l'economie." Why is it that the more he has talked about these things, the farther we have receded from them? The answer is blowing in the wind.

The mess that has been made of the economy, an economy that potentially remains one of the most promising on the African continent, needs no further comment. But just look at the mess that has been made of education in this country. There are teachers in this country who have not been paid for over 12 months but who patriotically have been fulfilling their duties at the most basic levels of our educational system. The religious bodies (Voluntary Agencies) are the bedrock of our educational system at the primary and secondary levels. The crisis in Voluntary Agency education must be reserved for special treatment.

Now they are telling us they have created six universities. The question I asked before and which I am asking again is: if for over three decades they failed to find the correct formula for running a single university, how do they hope to be able to run six universities? Are these universities, "created" with a stroke of the pen, not one more giant fraud, one more superb gimmick, especially when we all know that there has neither been planning nor preparation for them? Your guess is as good as mine. If you want to know mine, go back and read my "Blueprint for University Studies (1) & (2) and then "A Basket Full of Promises."

Where university students not repeatedly assured only a few months ago, even by the Prime Minister himself, that the practice of scholarship for all and sundry would not be abolished and that all arrears of scholarship money would be paid? Now they not only have not been paid but scholarship has been suppressed and they are being asked to pay 50.000 franc each! And this at a time when there is no franc in sight for ordinary Cameroonians.

One of the main problems with this regime is blatant dishonesty. Lying is an indispensable procedural necessity for the regime. I'm no longer talking about Kontchou. No other member of the regime can avoid what Kontchou has been doing on a wider scale. Just look at someone like Shey Jones. Those who know him very well testify that he is a simple, straightforward type of guy who would not lie. Yet I personally verified that Shey Jones, Honourable Minister of Works etc, lied when he gave his word in Bamenda that the construction of the Bambui-Fondong road would start before Christmas. It did not start even after Christmas. Has it started even now? Go and find that out for yourself!

Now they have gone and burnt down some lecturers' wooden offices, reducing several decades of careful research work, expensive equipment, books etc to rubble and ashes. The Chancellor and Gendarmes are trading accusations. The Chancellor says he suspects the gendarmes. The gendarmes retort that they suspect him because they were instructed to guard only three places including the long "Berlin wall." As for Pa Foch, he is reported to have sworn on his honour and experience as a cop that the victims of the arson must be the arsonists themselves. Those who witnessed the aftermath of the proclamation of the presidential results in the N.W. Province are familiar with this scenario.

Published February 4-10, 1993. [Completely censored the previous week (Campost January 27 – Feb. 3, 1993), this piece got published only thanks to a clever manoeuvre by the production manager, Rene Awambeng].

The CRTV Versus the People

Officially, democratic rhetoric has been going on in this country now for over a decade. This rhetoric is epitomized in *Communal Liberalism*: two hundred pages of empty theorizing which, as has now been confirmed, were composed (in good faith) by François Sengat Kuo and signed (in bad faith) by you know whom. For over a decade, we have been deafened with catchy phrases and sweet slogans: Democratization and Liberalization, Rigour and Moralization, New Deal etc. But, outside the verbal and conceptual realm, there has been very little change, except in the direction of degradation, degeneration and retrogression. One accurate index of this sad state of affairs is the Cameroon Radio and Television alias C.R.T.V.

When democratization and liberalization shall cross the deep chasm separating theory and practice, the first effects shall be immediately noticed over the C.R.T.V. Until then, the C.R.T.V. evidently is, has been, and continues to be, a powerful weapon in the hands of a totalitarian monolithic Regime.

Any careful observer needs only to watch the C.R.T.V. to accurately monitor the democratization process in Cameroon.

Today, there is hardly any regular programme in English on Radio or Television that is worth listening to or watching. Before the Reunification and after, up to the 1972 Referendum, *Radio Buea* had some very interesting programmes to which people listened almost compulsively. Recall such programmes as “Radio Titbits,” “Where are

We?,” “Request Time,” “Meet the Patients” etc. The spirit and professional expertise behind such programmes later animated their larger equivalents in Yaounde: “Cameroon Report,” “Cameroon Calling,” “Minute by Minute,” “Luncheon Date” etc. These were programmes that virtually everybody listened to or watched. And when that happens to any programme, you can be sure that there is something of value in it. These were fascinating programmes that you hated to miss. Today all these programmes have simply been banned and the very fine journalists who conceived and produced them sacked, scattered or gagged.

I cannot remember when last I deliberately tuned on radio Cameroon or sat down to watch Cameroon Television. Occasionally, I only stumble on them. And whenever I stumble on them, I am more often than not, nauseated by what I hear or see.

The C.R.T.V. has developed into a shameless propaganda device for the regime in power. The C.R.T.V. is today very accurately personified in its overall boss: Minister (of state) for Communications, His Excellency, Augustin Kontchou Kouomegni, alias Zero Mort, who will surely be remembered in human history as the first person to raise official lying to the status of a fine art. I don’t know whether contemporary historians and chroniclers are taking note of these things.

Before May 1990, Cameroon Radio and Television had some semblance, of credibility. In May 1990, it lost all credibility. On that occasion, the Cameroon armed forces cold-bloodedly killed six innocent non-combatants in Bamenda and the C.R.T.V. came out with a bag full of carefully fabricated lies to cover up the crime. They shamelessly and repeatedly announced that the Bamenda six were trampled to death by the crowd of which they were a part; that thousands of Nigerians took part in the rally during which the Social Democratic Front (SDF) was launched at Ntarikon Park; that the leader of the SDF, Ni

John Fru Ndi, had escaped to Nigeria; that students at the University of Yaounde sang the Nigerian National Anthem the same day the SDF was launched etc, etc. Since then, the C.R.T.V. has continued in its propagandistic mendacity until today when it has hit real rock bottom.

Nearly every Cameroonian knew that Ms. Frances Cook took a special invitation to Chairman Fru Ndi in Bamenda, while he was still under house arrest within the state of emergency, to attend the inaugural ceremonies of Bill Clinton. C.R.T.V. went to the market with the story that no Cameroonian had been invited to the Clinton ceremonies. Later, this disclaimer was modified to "officially invited." Then a whole crowd, including the presidential majority, seemed to have been invited. The C.R.T.V. quickly assembled a powerful team, lead by the incomparable Charles Ndong and the forked-tongued equivocator and apologist, Lucas Ananga, to parry the effects of Fru Ndi's spectacular presence at Bill Clinton's inaugural. From the *Voice of America* and *Radio France International* we all heard about the unusual reception accorded Fru Ndi. But not a word from the C.R.T.V. Instead, they assured us that no Cameroonian had shaken hands with President Clinton. As the most important opposition leader, they should have shown us Fru Ndi, to tell Cameroonians what he was doing at Clinton's inaugural. But no! They showed us Gustave Essaka! of all creatures, and gave him enough air time to run down Fru Ndi. Ah, the things human beings can do to earn a living! Even if we were not all paying a special C.R.T.V. tax, this situation would still be intolerable and absolutely unacceptable. It is intolerable. It is unacceptable.

Published February 9-16, 1993

Sir, I Like Your American Accent, But...

You may think I am talking about Lucas Ananga. No. I used to call him Luke Ananga. But recently I joined the chorus in calling him Lucas Ananga. At first I didn't like the sound of "Lucas." It sounds so old-fashioned, so ballardish, if you get what I mean. I know someone who was baptized "Nicholas" at birth but who today could fight you if you called him that. He has since become "Nicky" and nothing else. Before I started calling Luke Lucas or rather before I stopped calling Lucas Luke, I had an interesting encounter with some young fellows after one of Lucas' (pronounced Lucasis) now famous political analyses. He is a senior political analyst, you know. These young fellows continued yapping about Lucas Ananga and his political yabies, which clearly make him one of the best apologists of the New Deal regime. I told them that I shared their point of view but that why did they insist on calling the young old man (with his remarkable moustache) "Lucas"? One of them retorted: "Doesn't he look like an ass?" "Not to me," I replied. "Then you had better look again," he enjoined, "for Lucas Ananga is nothing but a nagging ass!" After listening to a few more of his political analyses, I unconsciously also started calling him "Lucas."

No, I am not talking about Lucas. I don't admire an Anglophone who speaks English with an American accent. If an Anglophone really wants to speak English, let it be Queen's English, BBC English. Like Peter Essoka. But,

unlike Peter, without sophism and equivocations, clearly calculated to parry deadly blows destined for the regime within which he was found worthy to be a Director.

After Lucas Ananga's own directorate of senior political analyses assured us here that no Cameroonian had been invited to Bill Clinton's inauguration ceremonies, we saw Lucas himself there conversing in a quiet corner with the black American preacher, Jesse Jackson. His American accent must have proved very useful at that point in time. Then we got further assurances from the political directorate that no Cameroonian had shaken hands with Bill Clinton. Now back home, the directorate has taken several days noising it all over the place that Bill Clinton had written to Paul Biya...in answer to his (Biya's) letter... congratulating him (Clinton). No one ever told us Paul Biya had written to congratulate Bill Clinton.

So what do we have on our plates, thanks to the political analyses? The following scenario: Paul Biya sent a letter of congratulations to Bill Clinton which was duly acknowledged. America never congratulated Paul Biya when he purportedly won his own presidential elections last October. Instead, the Americans invited Ni John Fru Ndi who claims to have won the presidential elections which Biya coveted and Bill Clinton found the time to meet John Fu Ndi after which he answered Biya's letter. No political analysis is required here. It's all clear, as Kontchou would say.

It's really amazing that the strategists of this power-drunk regime have not yet realized the futility and counter-productiveness of their cherished propaganda method of denials and disclaimers. Recently we had one good one. It was vehemently disclaimed that His Excellency, our Head of State, was going to wed the daughter of a neighbouring Head of State on 12th February 1993. Well, no one said that he would not wed her on another date. And, the wedding apart, no one denied that he knows the young princess the way Adam knew Eve. So, where are we?

Sorry for the digression. Sometimes I get carried away. It is Antoine Ntsimi, the Honourable Minister of Finance, whose American accent I so admire. When a full-blooded Francophone speaks American English the way Mr. Ntsimi does, you just can't help admiring him. America, with its highly liberal and democratic values, is at the farthest remove from France and its African neo-colonies with their highly repressive dictatorships animated with democratic rhetoric. I once visited France (Paris) in 1982 and I noticed that French people admire American English greatly. If you committed a misdemeanour such as driving on the wrong side of the road or using the "Metro" without a ticket, and you were caught, and if you could break into real rapid American English with lots of "bullshits" "geddams" and "mother (f-) mens," they could end up not only letting you off the hook but apologizing to you.

But, Mr. Minister of Finance, much as we admire your American accent, we are not assured by your assurances. Are you aware of what transpires daily at the Central Treasury right here in Yaounde? I spent the whole week beginning Monday, 1st February, trying to cash a treasury voucher of less than 100.000 francs. I saw hell, and many Cameroonians with me. From the capricious little lady called the *'fonder'* (whatever that means) who is always away to see her leg doctor (what is wrong with her leg?), through the director of the treasury himself to the counter cashier, it is the same laxity, insensitivity, trickery and capriciousness. Is the lady with the sick leg the only Cameroonian of her qualification and calibre available? What of this 20% affair? Those who accept to forgo 20% of their money get their vouchers promptly cashed through the back door. Are you yourself a percenter or are you unaware of all this, Mr. Minister?

Published February 23-March 3, 1993

Where is the “Grand débat” We Were Promised?

I woke up from my bed today to the sound of a beautiful but slightly pathetic song with the chorus: WHERE IS THE LOVE YOU PROMISED ME? I’m sure you know the tune. My mind immediately went back to the “grand débat” we were promised since October. There are few things in human relationship as painful as a failed promise. A false promise belongs within the same brackets as a betrayal.

When I wrote “A Basket Full of ...Promises” as far back as October 1991, some readers of this column, especially disciples of Dr. Biya and his “New Deal” gospel, were upset. Some of them even went as far as calling NO TRIFLING MATTER “Gobata’s Satanic Verses.” I kept cool. As usual. But just examine the evidence yourself. Take a look only at the very recent track record of the regime. Just before the ill-fated presidential elections last year, we were assured that the Victoria deep sea port would soon go operational, that the Tiko sea and air ports were fully operational, that the Bisongabang airport would soon be revived. Go and find out which of these things has happened. The Prime Minister himself assured University students in front of the National Assembly that University bursaries would not be scrapped and that they would be paid all their accrued arrears. Today all University students are paying fees. The same P.M. told crowds at the Fon’s palace in Nso, Bui Division, (where he reportedly gave the Fon a bribe of 600.000 francs which the latter later left for his councillors and courtiers to scramble over) that 75% of the funding for

the Ring Road had already been secured. Why don't they construct 75% of the road? The answer is blowing in the wind.

Shortly before "A basket of Promises," in the Cameroon Post of Sept. 6-13, 1991, NO TRIFLING MATTER had observed: "The Biya regime has become like a stubborn jigger in the foot. Shall Cameroonians endure the pain and trauma of removing it or give up and limp along with it as best as possible? That is the critical choice." Well, Cameroonians have opted to continue limping. May be this is not an entirely bad choice when we consider developments in Togo and Zaire. For, make no mistake about it, Eyadéma of Togo, Mobutu of Zaire and ours truly are birds of identical plumage. These are the millionaire-dictators in Africa. They are all suffering from the Samuel Doe syndrome. In "The Does of Africa" (NO TRIFLING MATTER, Oct 24-31, 1991) I called all of them by name and composed a litany for them (in which I inadvertently missed out the name of Kamuzu Banda of Malawi) praying them to have mercy on their people.

It is very painful that Cameroon, which should be sprinting, is limping along because of a jigger in the foot called... (fill the blank yourself) which it cannot endure the pain of taking out. But even limping can be done well, with common sense and even a bit of style. Is the fact that someone is limping a good reason to fall into every pit on the road especially those into which he had fallen before?

Immediately after His Excellency's "victory" at the last presidential elections, he solemnly promised a "grand" national "débat." We were all excited. Five whole months after the promise, where is the grand débat? I can tell you where it is. It is in the same basket as "la démocratie avancée," "L'unité nationale," "relance de l'économie," "rigueur et moralization" etc, etc-a completely empty basket of famous platitudes.

During the last presidential elections, over 1 million potential voters could not exercise the franchise. Reason: the regime insisted that they could not break the law by opening the electoral registers outside of the legally stipulated period. But they could break the law in holding the elections six months before the stipulated time. The legally stipulated period for registration is January to March of each year. Half of that period has already elapsed without the electoral registers being opened. Have they not already broken the law? Can what should have been done over three months be done within a month? Even if the voter registration exercise were started now, as I am writing this, it cannot be completed before the end of March, knowing the nature of these things. An exercise of that nature always needs concerted and sustained propaganda over all divisions of the mass media. The way things are going, there will still be thousands of unregistered eligible voters by March-ending. And when an extension of the period shall be demanded, the Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals (what are “seals” and where does he keep them?) shall go into a rage and start stammering and foaming at the mouth (like Caesar) and quoting the law. It must be emphasized that the voters’ registration exercise does not concern only the political parties. It concerns the Cameroonian masses of which the Biya regime is so understandably scared. Readers of this column are earnestly prayed in the name of a liberal, democratic and prosperous Cameroon, to take it upon themselves, individually and/or collectively to wage an incessant campaign for all eligible Cameroonians to insist on being registered on the electoral list.

We are half way up the step of CHANGE to the Cameroon of our dreams in spite of the significant recent backsliding. We cannot give up now. The recent condemnation to death of His Excellency Moussa Traore of Mali and his agents for the murder of peaceful

demonstrators in 1991, should be a great encouragement to us. It clearly shows that the hour of reckoning for the African millionaire repressive dictators has arrived.

Published Feb 22, March, 1993

The Fault is Not in Our Stars

Men at some times are masters of their fates: The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, But in ourselves, that we are underlings -

Shakespeare

No human being can be kept as a slave for very long without his/her own connivance. This is because all human beings are free, self-determining and purposive beings. This being the case, we are forced to conclude that Cameroonians themselves are responsible for their present plight. You cannot sincerely choose an end without at the same time choosing the means necessary to attain that end. Otherwise, you want to eat your cake and still have it. But it is absolutely impossible to eat your cake and still have it. If you want to prepare an omelette, you bloody well have to pluck the courage to crack eggs. Otherwise, you are an infantile somnambulist dreamer.

Most Cameroonians are infantile dreamers. Apart from the really big-time public thieves, there is no Cameroonian who is not dying for change in this country. Yet how many are willing to do the minimum required to bring about change? In all honesty and fairness, only the populations of Bamenda and the N.W. Province in general have demonstrated a sufficiently convincing indomitable will for change. If others were like them, we would long have been firmly into a new Cameroon with justified hopes of fulfilling our day dreams. But most of us have only been day-dreaming and doing nothing else.

When the salary cuts we are all “enjoying” now were first announced, a Frenchman here in Yaounde told me that he didn’t know of anywhere in the world where such a drastic reduction in salaries could be carried out in one swoop. According to him, if such a thing were attempted in France everybody, including those who don’t earn any salary, would be out on the streets, within one hour of the announcement, demonstrating. I told him that Cameroonians were slow learners and that I didn’t expect them to start demonstrating until they had actually received their January salaries and realized that the cuts were for real and not a New Year joke. But as things turned out, I was even wide off the mark: When the actual cuts finally came, they were more drastic than anyone had imagined. But not a murmur from any quarter! People were only crying on their wives’ laps in the comfort of their bedrooms.

Shortly after the salary cuts, fees were announced for University students. I thought the Government had made a serious tactical error, a blunder it would soon regret. I didn’t see any magic any government could perform to get University students (of all groups of citizens) to pay fees after they had all registered and settled in and were still agitating for arrears of the previous year’s bursaries. But, there again, I was wrong. We soon heard university students sending radio messages to their parents and guardians to urgently send their fees by telegraphic ‘mandat’! What exactly did Alhaji Ahidjo do to Cameroonians to completely emasculate them in this way? The answer is blowing in the wind. But it is not at all easy to live with the realization that one is numbered among 12 million castrated bull dogs.

The rape and pillage of the country has continued unabated under the same phoney rhetoric and dramatics. We hear of military co-operation accords between France and Cameroon. What military secrets can France learn from Cameroon? Mr. Charles Pasqua (what a name!), a fat

Frenchman, was here recently secretly to ask for money to finance the French legislative elections coming up in March. How much he was given out of our common purse remains a subject of wide speculation. In Togo, Mr. Pasqua showered praises on Eyadéma (of all African dictators!) and in Cameroon on our own Paul Biya and, in exchange went back with sacs of African money to finance French elections. Now, do you think that if the French were rich they would come to ask for money from here to finance their elections? Yet there are Cameroonians who foolishly believe that the French can and want to help us out of our economic crisis. Even if they could they wouldn't. Quote me. Look at the speed with which they are exploiting our forest reserves at a time when all other countries are doing everything to preserve what they still have left as forests. And now they add insult to our injuries by putting a Frenchman in charge of our central treasury. Of course, Dr. Biya knows why he did it.

As long as we tolerate being exploited by the French we will never have change in this country. Quote me. Do you think the French don't know why they are supporting this repressive and dictatorial regime? I say, down with French neo-colonialism and exploitation! When we boycotted them and their fancy products, did they not feel the pinch? So why do we want to relent? I say, let us intensify the boycott until the last French neo-colonialist and exploiter has left our shores, never to return. If the French want to know who grave the "*mot d'ordre*" for the boycott of their products, let them be told that, I, Rotcod, son of Gobata, is one of those who suggested the boycott.

Published March 3-10, 1993

From Autocracy to Dyarchy

In 1972, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, displaying a touch of premature senility, proposed what has come to be known as “Zik’s Fourth Arm Theory.” In a speech delivered in his capacity as the then Chancellor of the University of Lagos Zik proposed that the army should be recognized as the Fourth arm of government, alongside the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Zik made this proposal at a time that Nigeria, which had been under military rule since 1966, started vigorously discussing the handing over of power back to civilians, which had been planned for 1976. Yakubu Gowon subsequently reneged on the plan and got booted out of power in one of the most spectacular coup d’état in contemporary history, while he was attending an OAU summit conference in Kampala, Uganda.

It is very significant that, although Zik had been one of the pioneer African journalists, he completely forgot that it is usually the Press which has been termed “the fourth estate of the Realm,” that is to say, the fourth arm of Government. But, of course, there are very few countries where the press occupies this honoured position. Outside of Great Britain and the United States of America, the Press in all other countries is only struggling towards an approximation of that position as a prescriptive ideal. In African countries especially, with one or two notable exceptions, the Press is nowhere near even approximating the position. When I start talking about Zik, for example, do you think I want to talk about Zik? What is my concern with Zik? But, if I talk directly about what I want to talk about, and call a spade a spade, will the censors not completely cancel my page as

usual? Has that not often forced me to talk in parables and sometimes to start heading West when my final destination is East? If, like Bate Besong, they sometimes make me to present you with an empty page, I am, however, consoled by the fact that, even if I say nothing you can very well guess what I would have said, if you think objectively and disinterestedly.

But, to get back to Zik, what he was really proposing was that the Nigerian army should perpetuate itself in power by pretending to share power with civilians. That is why his proposal should be called military-civilian diarchy in spite of the spurious arguments which led Zik to the idea of a fourth arm of government. That Zik did not sincerely believe in his own proposal was confirmed a decade later when, in 1983, he ran for the post of President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria alongside people like Shagari, Awolowo and others. Zik did not choose a soldier for his “running mate.” The army has a function to play in every country. That function is not governing. Soldiers are not trained to govern. Their training and their functions generally are such that contact between them and the civilian populations should be very minimal. Soldiers should never be seen in good numbers except there is a rare ceremonial occasion or an outbreak of war. If you live in a country like Britain for ten years you would be lucky if you see a British soldier once in those ten years. That is how it should be.

One of the most cowardly actions of the “New Deal” regime, which seems to have got stuck like a stubborn jigger on our national foot, was its exemption of the armed forces from the recent general salary cuts. Members of the armed forces were already enjoying privileges which are the envy of all other citizens, such as free accommodation, free rides in public transportation vehicles, the prerogative to stop any motorist and demand to see his/her “*pièces de véhicule*” etc. In the last case, if you are foolish enough to hand over

empty documents or, to take him too literally and hand over a “piece,” you would “see pepper.” When an officer says “piece,” he means “billet” which should be carefully tucked inside your “pieces de vehicule.” Take careful note of those driving some of the most luxurious cars around town. Many of them are uniformed officers.

Why were members of the armed forces exempted from the general salary cuts? The answer is blowing in the wind. But from the time it happened, I knew that Dr. Biya was ready for an overt power-sharing exercise with the armed forces. He wants to perpetuate himself in power by instituting a civilian-military diarchy. The recent appointment or nomination of Generals only came to confirm this. We now have 15 Generals! What is a small country like Cameroon doing with 15 Generals in time of peace? The answer again is blowing in the wind. But the salary cuts would have been justifiable, credible and even welcome if they had started with the President of the Republic himself, passing through all the Ministers and involving everybody including all the members of the armed forces. Of course, no one ever talks about the President’s salary. He has no salary. The national treasury has continued to be his to do with as he likes. Before the end of this year, we need a President who will be earning a salary known to all Cameroonians.

As for the Generals, we hope that they are also patriotic Cameroonians. If any of them are not, we would only remind them to remember Idi Amin who once declared that power flows from the barrel of the gun and the fact that Valentine Straser of Liberia is not a General.

Published March 10-17, 1993

It is All A Sham, Make Believe

Recently, the war strategy and propaganda Minister of the ruling junta, Augustin Kontchou Koumegni, called a press conference; not to diabolize and run-down Fru Ndi but to talk AIDS! My mind immediately went back to one of the most memorable of his infamous press conferences to which he arrived looking haggard, dishevelled and insomniac, his big red eyes threatening to pop out of their sockets. I did not attend this particular conference but watched it over the television at my favourite drinking spot in Djoungolo. It was one of those occasions during which the television set stood in permanent danger of being punched or kicked, as we listened to the incredible outrages of this phenomenon from Baham. At a point when irate tension was reaching breaking point, someone shouted: "Are you sure this fellow is not suffering from AIDS?" We all roared with laughter and that helped in no small way to release the tension and relax the nerves.

It was really very refreshing to hear Professor Kontchou, who really must be as omniscient as any Cameroonian could be, talking AIDS for a change. At this rate I'm sure that he may soon be able to visit Baham. What man is it who wouldn't dare visit his own natal village? My guess is that Honourable Zero Mort has handed over his former functions to the mendicant clown called Gustave Essaka. This latter, who says he is the leader of DIC, (what on earth is DIC? Is it a person, a place or a thing? Your guess, as usual, is as good as mine!) was also present in Washington, USA, during Bill Clinton's inaugural ceremonies. Even as leader of DIC he was unable to meet Bill Clinton but, when he returned, he wrote him a letter.

In the letter, he pointed out that he had proved his respect for Bill by attending his inauguration “notwithstanding the meagre means of DIC.” (Maybe he expects the Americans to reimburse him). He then exposed two “shameless lies” by Ni John Fru Ndi, namely, that he (JFN) was invited to Bill Clinton’s swearing-in ceremonies “personally” and that he (JFN) shook hands with Bill Clinton. Essaka asks Clinton not to be Fru Ndi’s friend and not to support him (JFN) because with him (JFN) Cameroon risks being colonized “humanitarianly.” (All scholars and social scientists to take note of this new concept of humanitarian colonialism!). The author of humanitarian colonialism then concludes his letter by asserting that it is Paul Biya not Fru Ndi who brought democracy to Cameroon. Proof: he, Gustave Essaka, leader of DIC, was formerly a political refugee! How does that prove who brought democracy to Cameroon? That is the question that needs an answer.

But that was only a digression. I was talking about the fact that Kontchou has started talking about AIDS during his press conferences. Add to this the fact that the CRTV has recently also started occasionally announcing the Chairman’s rallies. You may then jump to the conclusion that things are really beginning to change in this country in a democratic direction. But, permit me to say that you are wrong, once more. It is all a sham. It is all make-believe. It is all so much smoke and dust in the eyes. Nothing, absolutely nothing, has changed for the better in this country. We are headed for more dictatorship, more repression, more subterfuges, more stratagems, more empty rhetoric and the real danger of completely destroying this beautiful country. I am not an alarmist or anything of the sort. Check my track record of analyses and predictions and judge for yourself.

If you doubt me, then you have, perhaps, not yet tried to register on the new electoral list. To go by what you occasionally hear over the radio concerning the exercise,

you would surely be led to think that, in spite of having started two months behind the legal stipulation, that we are at last about to lay the foundations of veritable democracy. But on the field, it is a completely different story. The whole exercise is nothing short of a big farce. The so-called registration commission was in my quarter for only three days. It took the son of Gobata three full days of pushing and struggling to get “registered.” By the end of the three days, there were still hundreds of unregistered neighbours standing on the queue. But the commission left, vaguely promising to come back around mid-April. They bluntly refused to register people with their birth certificates or those who had lost their national identity cards but had certified copies and attestations of loss. This is a flagrant violation of the electoral law in force but they plead “*des instructions d’en haut*”—orders from above. Where exactly is this “above”? The answer is blowing in the wind. And why stop the issuance of identity cards to *bona fide* Cameroonians?

The whole thing is part of the French game plan. Among all the neo-colonists, the French are the greatest anti-democrats. Without exploiting Cameroon, the French economy would be in very serious trouble. It would collapse like a pack of cards. The French know this very well. That is why the French would earlier reduce this whole triangle to dust and rubble than allow the instauration of genuine democracy. The French have correctly understood that the greatest danger to their continuous exploitation of Cameroon is Anglophone liberal thinking. They are now planning to use their pimps and puppets to drive a destructive wedge through Anglophone solidarity. Watch out for any attempts to break up West Cameroon. That would signal the end of Cameroon.

Published March 17 – 24, 1993

Unfrancophonic Francophones: The Last Reed of our Drowning Hopes

I always wonder how French people feel when they remember that it was their ancestors who, more than 200 years ago, carried out an epoch-making revolution whose battle cry was: LIBERTE, EGALITE ET FRATERNITE! I expect every French person to be thoroughly ashamed before this historical recollection. Among the technologically advanced predatory nations of the modern world, it is the French who believe least in Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. A mere glance at French colonialism, which has continued up to the present moment, would prove this. The French are shameless oppressors and exploiters. Just reflect a bit on what is happening all over Francophone Africa: Togo, Zaire, Cameroon, Algeria, Senegal, Burundi etc, and judge for yourself. From all indications, the French would have no qualms exterminating, through the help of their puppet dictators, the populations of some of these African countries so that they can continue to have their free petroleum, timber, cocoa, coffee, bananas etc. Today, I will again quote this column at some length. Writing about "Misconceptions of Federalism" (CAMEROON POST, May 6-13, 1992), I, Rotcod, son of Gobata, in this very column, said, *inter alia*:

"...there is something which we might call the "French Mentality" (for want of a better term) which seems to make it extremely difficult for any really *bona fide* Francophone to

grasp the logic in a demand such as that for a return to the federal structure. My guess is that this curious fact is to be explained by reference to the French-imposed francophone educational and administrative system with its well-known attributes of authoritarianism, dogmatism, centricism and intolerance. In February this year, I noted in my diary that Jean-Jacques Ekindi was the very first Francophone political leader of note ever to have spoken in favour of the Anglophone demand for a return to federalism. But today I am reading in CAMEROON POST (April 23-30, 1992) that Ekindi declared in Bamenda that he is strongly against federalism because it would be more costly than a unitary system. That leaves Mr. Samuel Eboua as the only Francophone political leader of note to have expressed sympathy with the Anglophone cause. And would you be surprised if he too changes his mind tomorrow? We've witnessed the scenario in other contexts many times before - recall Dicka Akwa, Woungly Massaga, Bouba Bello, Frederick Kodock, Dakole Daissala etc. Now, why are Francophones so flexible (not to say unreliable) in these matters? The answer is blowing in the wind!"

It is really amazing when you look back (not necessarily in anger) at the consistently inconstant character of heavy-weight Francophones since the democratic struggle broke out into the open in this country in 1990. At the time I wrote the lines quoted above, I was hanging my hopes on Samuel Eboa. Where now are those hopes I hung on him? Lying in the mud! Would you be surprised if tomorrow venerable Samuel declares for the presidential majority? Look at J.J. Ekindi. During the presidential campaigns, his verbal radicalism was the most extreme. But after the elections, after all the rigging, irregularities, supreme-court inconsistencies, theft of the opposition's victory, confinement of the victor, state of emergency etc., etc.; where was Ekindi? He, apparently simply became dumb and went underground. Was his radicalism only skin-deep? Judge for yourself.

It is alleged that Prince Dicka Akwa abandoned the cause when he was promised a job as a lecturer in anthropology at the University of Yaounde. In fact, his application file is said to be still going round the administrative circuit of that institution. As for Pa Eboua, rumours, which are coherent with the general trend, have it that the French kingmakers have assured him that if he allows Biya to complete his present five-year term peacefully, then when Bello Bouba (or is it Bouba Bello?) becomes president, he, Eboua, would be Prime Minister or vice versa. Not to worry about advancing age because they would give him free medical attention until then.

Also recall Emma Ottou PPW. He was a charmer among the last presidential candidates. Emma Ottou won many worshippers the day he publicly undertook to personally ensure that the opposition fielded one single candidate. Later he came back to say that he had decided to maintain his own candidature because, in his efforts for a unique candidate, only the CDU had come to see him. So Emma Ottou made his undertaking on television and then went to wait in his house for the other opposition leaders to come to him! We had thought he was the one to go out to them. Is Emma Ottou PPW convinced that Biya won the October 11th elections? I, for one, I don't know. But I know that he was one of the first people to congratulate Dr. Biya.

What is the use belabouring the point? It is clear that we need to unearth the fundamental reasons for Francophonic inconsistency if Cameroon is ever to achieve true independence and democracy. All hope is not lost. We still have already tested Francophones like Garga Haman, Hameni Bielieu, King Douala Manga-Bell, and their likes to hang on to, like a drowning man unto a reed.

Published March 24-31, 1993

Unanglophonic Anglophones: The Clogs on our Libertarian Wheels

First of all, you would like to know what the son of Gobata thinks about the just re-announced “grand” national “débat,” not so? Well, here it is, straight, firm and unequivocal. It is all a grand diversionary ploy! Quote me. If anything satisfactory ever comes out of it, feel free to conclude that senility is catching up with this offspring of a noble name.

What are the reasons for my pessimism? Good question. Answer: This re-announcement was hurriedly arranged over the phone. You are, of course, aware that papa went to see Papa. Don't be surprised if he is still there by the time you are reading this. While our papa, who is only a kid in the eyes of his own Papa was there, the latter, who has himself not was performing too well lately, severely reprimanded our papa for his idiotic political blunders. Our kid-papa or pupil-teacher also had enough time to gauge the full international effects of the Fru Ndi phenomenon. When Garga Haman, Hameni Bielieu and Sengat Kuo were arrested last week, the French media were all over town (their own town) with the news. Here at home, Fru Ndi's tours and rallies have been a practical demonstration of what the members of the “Union for Change” mean by calling him the legitimate president and what he himself means by saying: “Biya has the arms but I have the people!” To crown it all, the World Bank and IMF, in spite of French efforts and propaganda, recently banged the front door against Cameroon.

So, in panic, *oga* went for his medicine bag of magic tricks. The French joker (overt power sharing with the French) was already used, equally gone was the military joker (sharing power with the military in a veritable diarchy). But the bag is not yet empty and the first joker that came out was the “grand débat” thing. That is why the parrot (*porte-parole*) of the regime was directed to re-announce the famous “grand débat” with neither agenda modalities, composition nor definite time-table.

They say it is neither a national conference nor the tripartite nor a constituent assembly. So, what is it? Damn it, it's a “grand débat”! They say everyone will be involved and all shades of opinion will be taken into consideration. But how? Have they, at last, found a way of inviting 12 million Cameroonians to the conference table? And when everyone has been heard and all shades of opinion taken, what next? Did you notice that when the English news commentators made a characteristic slip of the tongue, by saying that the whole exercise would end in a referendum, they were made to recant and eat their words immediately?

Well, don't get me wrong. Don't imagine that I will be boycotting the “grand débat” the way I've been boycotting French goods and services. Not this time around. I will surely be there to represent the national association of sceptics. I may even be there in a dual capacity. You surely are aware that West Cameroonians are taking the issue seriously. They are all working towards a harmonized and unshakable common position. Three decades ago our fathers were deceived and cheated at Foumban. This is a golden opportunity for us to redress the effects of their vincible and invincible errors. We must not fail or waver. To do so would be to condemn our children to a worse fate than has been our lot in the last two decades.

Which brings me to the unanglophonic Anglophones. These are the speed breaks on our road to a freer, juster and democratic Cameroon where the West Cameroon Anglo-

Saxon heritage is not swept under the thick carpet of Francophonism with its phoney values. The Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage, especially the English language, is emerging unarguably as the culture of the entire world. So why would we throw away such a valuable heritage just to satisfy the selfish schemes of French people who have continued to consider Africa as a farm that should be exploited but not tended? Don't confuse the issue of federalism with the problem of decentralisation. Decentralization concerns all Cameroonians. Federalism, strictly, concerns only West Cameroonians. Even when we get back the separate federal status which was illegally and unacceptably abolished in 1972, we will also need more decentralization to allay the fears and worries of sundry minorities. On the other hand, unless our very reasonable demand meets with stubborn resistance, there is no cause, thus far, to associate federalism with secession. I've said this before. We need to be conceptually clear about our demands.

Our only fear is with the "unanglophonic Anglophones." These are the fellows who have benefited and continue to benefit immensely, personally, from the regime and the status quo. These are those who will create the spectre of secession and try to throw confusion and discord amongst us. Our demand is in no way against the interest of Francophones in general. Last week, I talked about the unfrancophonic Francophones. They should be in a position to understand us as I consider them to be more our brothers than unanglophonic Anglophones. On the 11th February this year an Anglophone minister said before a radio microphone that "on 11th February 1960, West Cameroonians plebiscited..." Both his history and English are gone. The year was 1961 and "plebiscited" is a barbarism in English. If you put a fellow like that beside Yvon Omnes, I would surely prefer the latter to represent West Cameroonians in government.

Publish March 29, 1993

The Ironies of our History

As all West Cameroonians (Anglophones) were meeting in Buea, on the slopes of mount Fako, from April 2-3, 1993, to see what, together, they could salvage from their chequered and battered history, it was very interesting, if not instructive to glance at some of the ironies of that history. Buea was the capital of German Kamerun: that unique entity which was later quartered by the League of Nations and handed to Britain and France; the same conceptual entity that later gave the basis for the concept of Reunification. Buea remained the capital and administrative headquarters of Southern Cameroons throughout the Trusteeship period, became the capital of West Cameroon after the Reunification and remained the capital of the South West Province when the Federal system was abolished in 1972. Thus, Buea is no mean city.

With such credentials, the first palpable irony staring us the face is that Buea is today a pale shadow of its former self. More than thirty years after political independence, Buea is just a shouting distance from what we might call a "*Ghost Town*" without its Mboua Massock connotation and association.

This irony, on the purely physicalistic plane, is matched by a psychologistic dimension that is even more telling. Buea has not changed one bit since the early sixties. The only man-made noticeable structures are still the German monuments: The Prime Minister's Lodge, the old Secretariat, the Bismarck Fountain etc.; structures which have been left to decay and depreciate.

The most appropriate venue for the ALL ANGLOPHONE CONFERENCE (AAC) should have been the Buea University Centre. Anglophones who don't

yet appreciate sufficiently our predicament and the ironies of our situation were naively thinking that the Conference would hold at the Buea University centre. But, at the last minute, firm instructions came from Yaounde that the conference must not be allowed to hold at the Buea University Centre nor in any other public building. Attending this conference were nearly all Anglophones of substance, timber and calibre: John Ngu Foncha, former Prime Minister of West Cameroon, Vice President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon and first Vice Chairman of the unique CPDM party; Solomon Tandeng Muna, former Prime Minister of West Cameroon, Vice President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon and President of the monolithic National Assembly; Chief SML Endeley, paramount chief of Buea, the most powerful Fons of the North West Province, frontline scientists and scholars, ex-ministers, directors, technocrats, business magnets and tycoons etc, etc.

That this galaxy of prominent West Cameroonians and thousands of others in the nameless crowds, backed by the collective will of nearly 4 million West Cameroonians could not meet where they wanted in Buea (of all places!) is ironic in the extreme. It is exactly equivalent to somebody who returns to his own house and is barred from entering by a powerful stranger. This clearly shows that West Cameroonians have been reduced to SLAVES in a very literal sense in their own country. It is the slave whose actions are constrained by the will of another.

The denial of the Buea University Centre to all Anglophones is a most significant historical event. My guess is that, were it not for that callous denial, the conference would not have been so emotional and it would have been more difficult to reach consensus. At the opening ceremony, when the Mamfe choir called on our departed heroes and non-heroes to come and see the plight of Anglophones, I noticed many people, including myself, shedding tears. The whole scenario helped in no small way to dissolve the illusion

called North West/South West conflict, an illusion many people were sponsored from Yaounde to come and reinforce so that the gathering may end in total confusion. I saw some of these fellows with my own eyes sitting through the conference with their heads bowed to the ground. Such was the mood of the crowds that they dared not say anything that was jarring to the collective will of the people.

It was extremely moving, ironic and significant to see Pa Muna, who helped Ahidjo to manoeuvre Foncha out of power, sitting side by side with Pa Foncha and both cheering Albert Mukong whom they both considered a nuisance (at best) during their days in power. I predict that it would not be long before Achidi Achu, Ebong Ngolle, Ayuk Takem, Ephraim Inoni, Francis Nkwain, Peter Agbor Tabi and their likes, join the common cause of their own people. It is Chinua Achebe who once said that no individual can win a war against his own people.

The kernel of the message from "BUEA 1993" is extremely simple and clear. We say YES TO REUNIFICATION but NO TO ASSIMILATION! We are fed up with government by bribery, cajolery, intimidation, blackmail. We are fed up with government by the machine gun. We say ENOUGH is ENOUGH to the massacre of innocent Cameroonians, arbitrary abuse of freedoms and human rights. Let's go back to the 1961 Fouban Constitution, correct its weaknesses and move on from there more carefully. That is the only option that has a firm legal and historical basis and foundation. The English and the French belong to one common stock and are next door neighbours. But they have lived for millennia without ever attempting direct mixing because their respective cultures and ways of thinking are too divergent. Ditto for us on whom their respective cultures and languages have been foisted by historical circumstances.

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Bell Luc Rene's Dane Gun Theory

As the Biya regime continues hanging on to power, precariously, from a single finger of one hand, some members of the regime have really distinguished themselves, to such an extent that they would not only earn a significant place in our history books, but would qualify for mention in the world history of our epoch. One such person I identified before, who has earned the attention of contemporary world historians, is the Honourable Minister of State for communications, his Excellency Augustin KONTCHOU KOUOMEGNI, alias Zero Mort, alias government mouthpiece, alias discoverer and revealer of diabolic plans. There are many others. In fact, if you are a faithful reader of NO TRIFLING MATTER, I'm sure that you know most of them by name. But among them, Governor Bell Luc René of the North West Province, who should be christened THE DANE GUN GOVERNOR, is bidding fair for a very prominent place.

I once discussed "Zik's Fourth Arm Theory" in this column. If Zik has gained a place, even within the history of philosophy, for his fourth arm theory, Bell Luc René is poised to do no less, thanks to his Dane gun theory. On Thursday, 25th March 1993, as the new Catholic Bishop of Yagoua was being consecrated in Yagoua, machine gun fire was, once again, opened on armless and harmless civilian marchers in Bamenda, killing three and wounding and maiming several others. When I saw the pictures from Bamenda, my blood really ran cold and I lost the desire to

continue living. I have not yet regained it and, as I am writing this, I don't really care whether I am alive or dead. If a young person could go out of the house in the morning, strong and healthy, in Cameroon, in 1993, and get his brains blown out with a machine gun, for no reason whatsoever, tell me what one should be living for in this country of ours.

And then, to add insult to it all, the Governor of the very Province where the atrocity is committed comes on the air to tell the world that only a post mortem autopsy could determine whether the people were not killed by the Dane guns that they themselves were carrying. Let's not go into the issue whether or not the people were carrying Dane guns. On 26th May 1990, the Dane gun theory was not invoked. The six people who died then were said to have been trampled upon by the crowd of which they were a part, leaving one to wonder whether some members of that crowd had guns on their feet! Let's suppose without necessarily admitting, that the marchers of 25th March 1993 were carrying Dane guns. Are we then to suppose that they were carrying them on their shoulders, aimed backwards, and by some miraculous large-scale error, they simultaneously pulled the triggers to the detriment of their own accomplices behind? Or are we rather to suppose that, at the crucial moment, they all mistook themselves for the common enemy they were after? When an adult, let alone a governor, goes on the air to fabricate stories that even children recognize as belonging to the genre of "the cock and the bull" then there is something radically wrong.

The way things have been going in this country since October 1992, is enough to prove to anyone who might have doubted it, that the king of the jungle did not win the elections and knows it very well. Hence, the attempt to consolidate his hold on power through intimidation, sundry manoeuvres, blackmail, and repressive terror. For how long this can go on, is anybody's guess. But, please; let's stop all

empty rhetoric about “la démocratie avancée” and all that. The first indispensable tenet of democracy, anywhere, is the right to freely associate and to freely demonstrate. As I have once stated in this column, dictatorship is a viable form of government. Alhaji Ahidjo of blessed memory proved this. What is impossible is dictatorship masquerading under democratic garb. We are really sick unto death of Paul Biya and his machine gun democracy.

Recently, Professor KONTCHOU (once again) “uncovered a diabolic plan by the forces of evil, called the Union for Change, to install terror all over the national territory by kidnapping and assassinating expatriates. He must either be the Holy Spirit or an inner core member of the Union for Change.” But why doesn’t the learned Professor give us at least some credible evidence for his astounding “uncoverings” and “revelations”? And why is it that some of the foreigners who should have been assassinated, but for his timely discoveries, such as the Germans and the Americans, are instead urging Biya with ultimatums to re-conduct freer and fairer presidential elections? The answers, as usual, are blowing in the wind.

What are not blowing in the wind are the results of the autopsy that might confirm Bell Luc Rene’s Dane gun theory.

Published April 16, 1993

Louis Tobie Mbida's Naïve Candour

Louis Tobie Mbida (alias Baby Doc) passed on “Cameroon Calling” (CC) of Sunday 11th April 1993, to talk about Anglophones and Federalism. Before then, he had apparently participated in the French programme “Dimanche Midi” the previous Sunday, on the same theme. I never listened to the French programme but I did listen to the Cameroon Calling programme. Louis Tobie Mbida deserves to be applauded for his “franc-parler” and naïve candour on “Cameroon Calling” (CC).

Louis Tobie Mbida frankly and candidly admitted certain facts that most Francophones, especially those allied with the so-called presidential majority, would never admit. Even the unanglophonic Anglophones, the Judases of our socio-politico-economic situation, would not be caught admitting these facts publicly. The first of these facts, which “Baby Doc” admitted without equivocation, is that Francophones generally don’t understand what the hell Anglophones are complaining about; they have no idea what “the Anglophone problem” is all about and need to be educated in that respect. The second fact is that words like “freedom,” “democracy,” “transparency,” “peace,” “tranquillity” etc. mean a completely different thing from their French equivalents. The third fact, honestly admitted by Tobie Mbida is that, when Anglophones talk about “Federalism,” the mind of every Francophone immediately goes to petroleum alias oil alias black gold.

I repeat that Tobie Mbida could be congratulated for these frank admissions. I will surely buy him a bottle of any of the non-boycottable brands of beer if he passes by my favourite drinking spot in Djoungolo. Concerning the first point, it is certainly too much to expect that Francophones can, unaided, appreciate the Anglophone problem. That would demand a level of altruism that does not seem attainable by most human beings. Do you expect the slave-owner or his pampered heir to understand what the slave is complaining about? No matter how sympathetic you want to be, can you feel the pain on my back? It is only the wearer of the shoe who knows where it pinches. This is the reason that freedom is scarcely ever given on a platter of gold; it has to be taken by she/he who is in bondage. Francophones urgently need to be educated on the Anglophone problem and on the hidden fact that the liberation of the Anglophones will be equally the liberation of all other Cameroonians, for the Anglophone cannot liberate himself without at the same time liberating all others in bondage of all types.

Concerning the second point, it is very gratifying to have a full-blooded Francophone confirming what this column has never tired of observing (see, for example, "From La Démocratie to Democracy," CAMPOST, July 30-August 06, 1991). In these matters, as Tobie Mbida admits, Anglophones are several nautical miles ahead of Francophones. By "freedom" a Francophone understands "what the dictator in power permits." I was with a Francophone friend when the pictures of the 25th March horror in Bamenda arrived. We were both equally horrified. But his first remark was to wonder, not how any responsible government could commit such atrocity, but why the Bamenda people stubbornly went out even when they had been refused a permit. Governor Bell Luc René, who must have authorized the killings, was in Boyo Division, a week

later, qualmlessly preaching democracy and non-violence! No Francophone would see anything wrong with this. Dr. Paul Biya called for “democratic” presidential elections on his own accord. But when he lost, he told us he was a lion and sat tight. Very soon we found even Francophones who had wanted the throne themselves going into alliance with him or conceding his “victory” in the interest of “peace.”

The Anglophone political culture is open and libertarian and does not tolerate unjustifiable inconsistencies or deviations from proclaimed policies. John Fru Ndi’s track record is a quintessence of that culture which would be viewed by most Francophones as unnecessary rigidity and stubbornness. Fru Ndi is the only Cameroonian politician who has so far been thoroughly consistent with himself. When Anglophones demand a return to the two-state federal structure - a structure with a firm historical and legal basis - that is exactly what they mean. If they had wanted secession, they would ask for it. And, in fact there are sufficient grounds to ask for secession. But that is not the choice of the overwhelming majority of Anglophones. For now. The secessionists as well as the assimilationists did present their respective cases at the Buea All Anglophone Conference (AAC). The choice of federalism was an open and overwhelming choice. If the plebiscite were re-conducted today, with the same restrictive two options, I can bet that the result would be the same as in 1961. But by being intolerant to the overwhelming will of the Anglophones, or by trying to subvert it in characteristic ways, they could, in fact, be pushed into secession.

The *Buea Declaration* demands both a return to the two-state federal structure and decentralization, implying provincial relative autonomy. The two must not be confused. With a population of nearly four million today, West Cameroon certainly needs more than two provinces. The creation of provinces should simply follow demographic

developments. No province should be more than, say, 1.2 million or less than 800.00. That is why I think that the recent statement of the South West Chiefs, presided over by PM, Achidi Achu, in Mamfe, should be ignored as likely to cause confusion. By the way, is Achidi a chief? Is he a South Westerner? The answer is blowing in the wind. It is alleged he went there with a bag containing 30 million CFA francs. Is that the price of Southwest chieftaincy? The answer is blowing in the wind. But is it not very ironic that the chiefs of the Southwest can be led and tele-guided by a North Westerner to express their fears and unwillingness to be led and tele-guided by North-Westerners?

Published April 21, 1993

Ben Muna Opts for Political Harakiri

I have not yet laid my hands on the issue of JEUNE AFRIQUE in which Marc Yared reported his interview with Ben Muna. But, if what is reported about it in the Newspapers is correct, then it can confidently be predicted that Ben Muna has voluntarily chosen the path of political perdition...of political suicide. In fact, the same assertion could be made solely on the basis of Ben Muna's interview with Julius Barthson and Patrick Sienne in CAMEROON POST, No. 159, April 16, 1993.

Last year, this column had cause to write about Ben Muna and his premature abortive bid for the SDF presidential candidacy. (See Campost, September 24-Oct. 1, 1992). The said bid nearly caused an earthquake of rage among the grassroot supporters of the SDF. But in that situation, people seemed to be angrier with Ben Muna for the simple fact of being his father's son than for his sheer presumptuousness in imagining that he had what it takes to challenge Fru Ndi. Apart from genealogical considerations and the fact that he occupies considerable physical space, what other quality could lead Ben Muna to the illusion that he could be elected President of Cameroon? As an advocate of meritocracy, yours truly, stepped in to emphasize that children should not be held responsible for their parent's actions and to advise Ben Muna that he needed time and assiduous hard work to dispel the prejudices people have against him for being his father's son.

In the interview with Barthson and Sienné, which is full of incoherent contradictions and conceptual gaffs, Ben Muna claims that he is a “man of the people, not a bourgeois.” This is evidently false. If he were in any way close to people at the grassroots, he would surely be aware that Anglophones (West Cameroonians) are generally extremely bitter against his father and that many have always considered him (Ben Muna) a serious liability to the SDF on that account. There is no doubt that Solomon Tandeng Muna’s political opportunism and chameleonism are what helped the dictator, Alhaji Amadou Ahidjo, to neutralize the likes of Augustine Ngom Jua and John Ngu Foncha thereby facilitating his 1972 *coup d’état* in which he annexed West Cameroon.

During the All Anglophone Conference (AAC) in Buea last month, many people appreciated the fact that both Foncha and Muna were present. Foncha’s candour in admitting the limitations within which he negotiated the union with *La République du Cameroun* drew a lot of sympathy. Muna’s declared commitment to the present Anglophone cause also impressed many people. The general feeling in the crowds was that we should now forgive these two patriarchs and forge ahead with our struggle. But I heard at least one person declare that, while he had forgiven Foncha, he could never bring himself to forgive Muna. His reason was that Pa Muna not only sold us but was very selfish as can be seen from the fact that he used his position and influence to place all his children in very lucrative positions in *La République*. A story is still told how he once tried to impose Ben Muna as the legal adviser to the CDC. The attempt only failed when some people over played on the fact that Ben Muna is not exactly a bright lawyer, having taken twice the required period to earn his law degree.

Children should not be held responsible for their parents’ faults, even for what they become through their parents’ fault. They should be held responsible for their own actions.

The actions by which we can so far judge Ben Muna indicate that he might have inherited strong political characteristics from his father. This being the case, it can be confidently asserted that Ben Muna has no political future at all, not a chance, if we succeed in democratizing. But, if we fail, it is possible that France could help him along because of their pathological fear of John Fru Ndi. Some people are talking of a possible or even imminent split within SDF. Personally, I don't see any such possibility. If Ben Muna decides to quit the SDF, I can bet that he will not be able to take up to 12 disciples along with him. John Fru Ndi seems to be like an indomitable rock on which political adventurers smash their dreams.

Ben Muna says that he is not a dreamer, that he plays "real politik." Real politik, for him, means that the illegitimate Biya regime should be accepted because it "controls all the institutions of power in Cameroon." Muna's real politik means that we should allow French exploitation of our country because the U.K., Germany or USA cannot "really go against the interests of France" as all neo-colonialist countries "have a hand in Africa" and "the same interests to control the riches of Africa." Real politik means that we should co-operate with Biya and accept his undemocratic institutions and constitution while trying to change them. If this be real politik, the overwhelming majority of Cameroonians will, no doubt, continue to dream and to die with Ni John Fru Ndi. Prince Douala Manga Bell has put it very simply and very well: we have confidence in Ni John Fru Ndi.

When we recall that Ben Muna, the campaign manager of the SDF, was moving around freely and confidently during the state of emergency, while even floor members of the party were being hunted like animals everywhere, we need to ask whether he might not be playing a similar role to that played by the likes of Antar Gassagay and

Godfrey B. Tangwa (Rotcod Gobata)

Gustave Essaka in the opposition before the presidential elections. Only time will tell. To go by his vocabulary in his interviews, Ben Muna could be a potential member of the “Presidential Majority.”

Published April 29, 1993

The Nuances Between “Large” and “Grand”

Between “large” and “grand” there are important nuances in Dr. Biya’s advanced semantics. A “large débat” is not necessarily a “grand débat.” His Excellency has now made his precisions and put the records straight. He promised a “large débat” not a “grand débat” and people, apparently deliberately, misunderstood him to have promised a “grand débat”! There will be a “large débat” as promised. What is a “large débat”? Good question. According to the learned Doctor, it is a process whereby the constitution, which is already ready, as Prof. Owona said before the last presidential elections (don’t mind Simon Munzu!), will be proposed to all and sundry for their comments and observations. These comments and observations should be made from wherever they happen to be, since no hall has yet been found where 12 million Cameroonians could hold a meeting. Then the ready constitution will be presented to His Excellency to decide how to ratify it, either through Parliament or by referendum. But, since the latter is too costly and there is an economic crisis, you can surely draw the conclusion for yourself. Could this really be the ‘débat’ - ‘grand’ or ‘large’ - which Prof. Kontchou Kouomegni, the government’s mouthpiece, announced with such seriousness and solemnity a little more than a month ago? Your answer is as good as your neighbour’s.

Since Dr. Biya's semantic clarifications last night, some Anglophones (West Cameroonians) have been flattering themselves that it is because of their stand on Federalism and the *Buea Declaration* that Dr. Biya has run away from the "grand débat." In my humble opinion, they are wrong (again). Dr. Biya has not run away from the "grand débat" because there has never been any intention to have a "grand débat." Of course, the *Buea Declaration* and rising assertive Anglophone power are scaring the daylight out of the learned Doctor and his French mentors. But that is another matter.

Those who have been expecting a 'grand débat' are people whose naivety and lack of both foresight and insight has been slowing down and subverting the democratic process in Cameroon. The son of Gobata cannot be numbered among them. In February 1993 (see CAMOST, Feb. 22-March 2, 1993) *NO TRIFLING MATTER* asked: "Where is the 'Grand débat' we were promised"? and answered: "it is in the same basket as 'la démocratie avancée' l'unité nationale, 'relance de l'économie', rigueur et moralisation' etc, etc.- a completely empty basket of fatuous platitudes."

Again in "Unanglophonic Anglophones" (CAMPOST No. 155, March 29, 1993) the son of Gobata outlined all the immediate reasons which had necessitated the panicky announcement of the "grand débat" as a magic card ploy, among many others, to keep Cameroonians as docile slaves. There, I stated, *inter alia*: "...in panic, oga went for his medicine bag of magic tricks. The French joker (overt power sharing with the French) was already used; equally gone was the military joker (sharing power with the military in a veritable diarchy). But the bag is not yet empty and the first joker that came out was the "grand débat" thing. That is why the parrot (*porte parole*) of the regime was directed to re-announce the famous "grand débat" with neither agenda, modalities, composition nor definite timetable." So

confident was the son of Gobata of his intuitive certainties that he boldly declared that he would accept the title of “senile offspring of a noble name” if anything satisfactory ever came out of the so-called “grand débat”- a grand diversionary ploy!

I hope we can all see clearly now. Among Cameroon’s political pretenders, only John Fru Ndi and his acolytes in the Union for change seem to have a thorough understanding of what we are up against. Fru Ndi saw from a distance that the “grand débat” was a grand diversionary ploy. Hence, he simultaneously announced the convening of a Sovereign National Conference. Those who thought he was just joking can reappraise things for themselves. If Fru Ndi were not a rather serious and earnest person, I would expect him to lie back on his armchair and have a good long belly laugh at the myopia and naivety of some of us, Cameroonians.

As for Anglophones and the *Buea Declaration*, the handwriting on the wall is extremely clear. The thing to do is to bang at the door of the United Nations, immediately. If we can learn from past errors, once those doors are opened, we should not demand a restoration of the Federation but rather our determination to get out of it all. The Ambazonists whom we all booed at Buea might have been right. If we make the tactical error of asking but for the restoration of Federation, it shall cost us anguish, blood and lives before we finally demand to opt out. Federation? Not while Mr. Biya remains in power. Quote me. Luckily we have a very strong case.

Published May 3, 1993

The Descent Into Hell

As if I were merely joking or making use of hyperbole, I once remarked in this column that Dr. Biya would be remembered in history for his attempt to destroy this beautiful country called Cameroon. Although his regime is basically a kleptocracy, it has, for pragmatic reasons, developed tribalism and repressive dictatorship to match the level its kleptocracy. No Cameroonian can deny that Alhaji Ahidjo was a ruthless dictator. But as the son of Gobata again remarked before, the Alhaji will be forgiven all his dictatorial sins except the imposition of Paul Biya as his successor in dictatorship. Dr. Paul Biya has not only completely ruined the economy of this country within ten year, but has brought the country to the brink of total disintegration. For the drop of a pin this country could disintegrate completely, the way things are at present.

The political blunders of the Biya regime, which even children have learned to recognize from a distance, are such as to make one wonder whether those who claim the man is not sound upstairs might not in fact be right. Today, Dr. Biya effectively lives abroad and runs the country from there by telephone. Last Friday, April 30th, he dashed in for a while to address the nation in the guise of an interview with Charles Ndongho. Listening to him as he rambled incoherently to the questions they had decided Charles Ndongho should ask him, one was filled with a sense of shame that this is our number one citizen. All through he cut the pitiable image of a slow-witted teacher before a class of retarded children. Now back to his European base,

he is sending us pictures in which he is posing and shaking hands with his French mentors. Is it handshakes with the likes of Charles Pasqua and Jacques Chirac which will solve Cameroon's problems?

In the meantime, the slow descent into hell, which we noticed as far back as 1990, has continued unabated and is gathering momentum. The brutal murder of Kamga Djongoue Collins, second year political science student at the so-called University of Yaounde II, is the latest indicator. This is a horrendous crime. Human life is the greatest value that we know as human beings. Any society where practices like the murder of Collins have become common-place should not consider itself a human society. There is no doubt that our society has become such a non-human society. From lawyer Boubda through Father Mbassi, Bishop Plumey, Father Fonteigh, Alhaji Tita Fomukong, Ngum Gideon, the Djoum Rev. Sisters to Ndam Souley and Kamga Collins (to mention only these), the scenario is very much the same. In none of these cases (with the possible exception of that of Father Anthony Fonteigh) have the real culprits ever been discovered, let alone punished. The most we have had are unproven allegations of guilt. This is just too poor for any organized society.

Well above the horrendousness of these crimes and the necessity to punish their actual authors, is the principle that a crime should not be hung on an innocent person. That is why, within what we have come to call the Anglo-Saxon cultural background, the cardinal principle has always been that it is better for a hundred criminals to go free than for a single innocent person to be punished unjustly. And in this connection, circumstantial evidence is, by itself, never enough to convict a person of such a crime. Punishing the innocent is a crime that is worse than, say, murder because, while there can sometimes be justified killing, punishing the innocent can never be justified under any circumstances,

real or imagined. The problem of why an innocent person should suffer is one that even God himself cannot justify as you would realize if you ponder the theological problem of the biblical Job.

The reaction of the government to some of the horrific murders listed above has been rather suspicious. In some of the cases in question, the reaction has been a deafening silence. In other cases, the orchestrated attempt to make political capital out of the murder has been so overdone as to make intelligent people take a pinch of snuff. In the latest case of Kanga Collins, the reaction and behaviour of the authorities can be described in one word: OBSCENE. My intuitive feeling in this case is that, when the dust will settle and the chips come down, the prosecutors might be the ones in the dock with the accused in the witness box. The performance of the University and higher education authorities on television and radio regarding the Kanga case was extremely poor (an understatement). Mediocrity could actually be the criterion of appointments in this country.

We hear rumours that their Excellencies, Zero Mort and Fochive, are under house arrest and security surveillance, respectively. There can be no love lost between this duo and the Cameroonian masses. Many Cameroonians, rightly or wrongly, consider them the architects of government repressive terror in the country. Suppose, just suppose, that one morning you wake up and hear over the CRTV that a mob of their numerous enemies had lynched them overnight! What would you say?

Published May 10, 1993

Let Them Be Anathema

This past week, the first week of May, many people who happened to have met me were asking me if I practice witchcraft. In Buea, I met one person who was running after me and shouting “Rotcod, Rotcod, son of Gobata! You were right again! You are always right. Are you a wizard? How did you know Bi Mvondo was not serious about the Grand Débat”? Another told me; “But you were too harsh on Ben Muna. The Postman was more objective and gentlemanly.”

Well, I am not a wizard and I was not harsh on Ben Muna. As for gentlemanliness, I don’t care for it. I believe that gentlemanliness is only for societies which have transcended the sort of elementary problems we are facing. It is not good to take gentlemanliness like okro soup and swallow a cockroach. I am not only not a wizard but I know nothing about witchcraft. Those who are interested in witchcraft can go and ask one priest called Fr. Humphrey Tatah Mbuy who is always talking and writing about witchcraft. The weekend I was in Buea, the said Rev. Gentleman was even launching one of his witchcraft books.

I was not harsh on Ben Muna. I’m sure that he himself would agree with me because I hear he is a courageous man who is never afraid to look truth in the face. I’ve also heard that he is a very nice and generous guy. Even Boh Herbert admitted this in his “harsh” piece published in another newspaper. Did Ben’s generosity and niceness prevent some media houses and columnists from coming down as harshly on him as would otherwise have been the case? The answer

is blowing in the wind. But Ben blundered. He has admitted it and accepted his “punishment” with admirable equanimity. He really seems to have all it takes for a frontline position in public life, except that he is his father’s son. And this is an issue over which popular prejudice will always put reason and logic to flight. It is a very good thing, both for Ben Muna and for the SDF, that he has been reduced to a floor member of the party. If he takes my earlier advice, he will surely achieve all his ambitions in the long run.

Yes, the son of Gobata has often been right; so often right that he is tired of being right. It seems to me that most Cameroonians just refuse to face reality, are too calculative of personal interests, or indulge in too much wishful thinking or all of the above. This is one reason that, among the political leaders, it is Fru Ndi who has always been right. Is he a wizard, or does he possess paranormal qualities? No. He is simply honest and earnest about a cause he risked his life to get off the ground, and has continued to risk his life to sustain. This is very evident to the popular *massa damnata* who also quickly see through all those who want to ride rough shod over Fru Ndi’s back to power they cannot achieve on their own.

Those who think that witchcraft was needed to know in advance that Dr. Biya’s grand, sorry, large *débat*, was an empty false promise, not worth the breath used in pronouncing it, are those who don’t understand our fundamental problem and how it is to be solved. It is this lack of understanding that has put all of us in the quandary in which we are today. There have been several squandered opportunities for a definitive solution of our problem.

Dr. Biya said in his April 30th interview that the “large *débat*” would take place during the first ten days of May. Well, I am writing this after the first ten days of May. Where is the “large *débat*”? Or, had it already taken place before the interview, as Charles Ndongso so wisely suggested during

the interview? Your guess is as good as mine. Here is mine. I searched in my dictionary, but I could not find “large débat.” I only found “large” in one place and “débat” in a completely different place. Nowhere did I find the two together. My guess then is that Dr. Biya hadn’t enough time to consult his dictionary before the interview. Remember he had just rushed back from a long short private visit in Europe to give the interview. So, may it not be the case that, immediately after the interview, His Grace, Jean Zoa, Archbishop of the Metropolitan Sea of Yaounde, telephoned the learned Doctor to complain that “large débat” was not in the dictionary? Who knows?

People of Anglo-Saxon cultural background, who scarcely consult dictionaries, and who boldly speak/write bad English without shame or apologies, should take note of these manoeuvres. Our situation is crystallizing very clearly. The renegades, outcasts and traitors among us are getting fewer and fewer. They are even publicly owning up and identifying themselves. They are free to return to the mainstream. However, should they refuse to heed the call to “return to your tents oh Israel!” and prefer the “flesh pots of Egypt,” as is most likely from all indications, then let them be anathema amongst us. May none amongst us ever again remember, let alone celebrate, the day of our enslavement! Twentieth May what? May not a bird be heard singing nor a fly seen flying on that day west of the Mongo. Within your tents, oh Israel!

Published May 14, 1993

Owona's "Jealous" Constitution

“Jealous of its independence and sovereignty....” So opens the preamble of Joseph Owona's draft constitution, fraudulently presented as the work of the 1991 Tripartite Technical Committee on Constitutional Matters. Have you read through this document yet? I have just finished reading through it. My first impressions? Well, the son of Gobata is nowhere near the sort of experts and specialists they tell us are responsible for writing this constitution. Nevertheless, I am honestly quite amazed that any group of educated Cameroonians, let alone experts, in 23 sessions (dixit Owona), some of which “lasted far into the night,” could present such a mediocre document as the result of a serious national assignment.

My bet is that Owona wrote up this whole thing alone and that he probably first wrote it in the Fang language, or something like that, before translating it. During the opening ceremony when he was presenting this draft to the P.M, I actually heard him say that it had been translated into French and English. So it must originally have been written in another language. In any case, it is quite clear that nobody for whom English is the first foreign language ever read through this draft before publication. The learned professor must have personally translated it into English himself without even allowing personal acolytes like Ephraim Ngwafor of “The Debate” fame to glance through it. I hear Ngwafor went through Sasse. The grammatical and syntactical howlers in this document are such that any true Sasse boy would need his red pen for almost every article. But we can't go into all that here.

Let me illustrate with only one or two examples, not at the level of grammar but at the level of ideas. “Jealous of”? How can anybody be jealous of his own independence and sovereignty? You are jealous of someone else for something he or she has, etc. You may be proud (not jealous) of what you have or of what you have acquired etc. So, to say that the people of Cameroon are jealous of their own independence and sovereignty is completely senseless. If a drunkard made a statement like that, we could excuse him for getting his ideas mixed up with a little wine. But to propose this as the opening sentence of a country’s Constitution, is simply outrageous. For all I know, the French expression “*Jaloux de son indépendance et de sa souveraineté*” might make sense in French. (Psychological factors have prevented me from really mastering the French language). But its literal translation is quite meaningless in English. Haley Brookes, the Director of the British Council and Her Majesty the Queen’s Chief Representative on Cultural Affairs here, can correct me if I am wrong on this point.

The first sentence of Article 10 states: “Freedom of belief and thought and freedom to profess religious and philosophical faith shall be inviolate.” Is this article conferring a freedom or acknowledging the existence of one? You guess is as good as mine. But note that “beliefs” are a subset of “thoughts.” To talk of “belief and thought” is a woolly way of thinking. What about “religious or philosophical faith”? “Religious faith” is a tautology. Is there anything like “philosophical faith”? That sounds like a contradiction in terms. We hear there are philosophers on the committee. Let them tell us. But if we apply our own Ockham’s razor, this chaotic sentence simply wants to say: Freedom of thought and expression shall be protected.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not about to contribute to the “Large débat” which they say we should do through newspapers. My own contribution, made at Buea during the AAC and here in Yaounde after the AAC, is with Simon

Munzu and Co. All I really want to point out here is that the New Deal regime of Dr. Paul Biya is about to miss another good opportunity which could lead to its easing itself out of power with grace, honour and even the applause of the Cameroonian masses. It is the same old game of manipulations, cajoleries, intimidations and bold lies. In characteristic fashion, the regime wants to push rubbish down the throats of Cameroonians with impunity and arrogance. Realism and a little honesty clearly indicate that the Anglophone problem can no longer be swept under the carpet and contained the way it has always been. What is being toyed with is the unity and destiny of this country which we all claim to love so much.

Dr. Munzu has been transparently frank and clear. If ours were already a democratic country, Professor Owona should resign for starting the “large débat” by boldly lying to the nation. We should not allow this sort of thing the chance of being carried over into the Third Republic. Were it not for fear of machine guns, hand grenades and tear gas, all Anglophones, except (but also including some) members of government would have been up like one man to demonstrate their total disaffection from April 30th when Dr. Biya clearly demonstrated that he was about to play the manipulative game again.

All public media of mass communication have continued to be used manipulatively, discriminatively and propagandistically for partisan purposes. Rank and file Francophones seem too tardy in abandoning the highly repressive and authoritarian mentality under which they have evolved in the past half century. If this state of affairs continues, then it could confidently be predicted that Eritrea’s “follow-back” the 53rd Sovereign African Nation, would soon be born. Believe me. I know Southern Cameroonians.

Published June 1-7, 1993

Francophones May Be Deaf But Certainly Not Dumb

Are some Francophones deaf or hard of hearing? I wonder. But, whether deaf or not, they evidently are not listening. If Francophones were listening, the great majority of them would already be supporters of the *Buea Declaration* and the draft constitution of the All Anglophone Conference (AAC), submitted to the so-called technical committee for the drafting of the new constitution by the trio; Munzu-Elad-Anyangwe. The AAC draft constitution is a masterpiece which contrasts sharply with the mediocre document Owona fraudulently presented to the Nation as the work of the 1991 Tripartite Committee. I am not claiming that the AAC draft constitution is perfect. Far from it. Re-reading it, I could even myself see little points, here and there, that I would recommend for adjustment. But the point is that the AAC draft constitution is an honest and carefully thought-out document which leaves nothing of importance to chance or rhetorical vagueness. It certainly can form the basis of serious national dialogue and genuine consensus.

It beats my imagination how, after the dissemination of the *Buea Declaration*, after Munzu's providential and spectacular passage on both radio and television, after publication of the AAC draft constitution, it beats me how some people, Francophones, could still continue insisting that Anglophones want to secede because of petroleum. We have said it over and over again, *ad nauseam*, that our

call for a return to the federal structure, a return to legality, historicity and honesty in the conduct of national affairs, has absolutely nothing to do with petroleum which, in any case, is fast drying up apart from the fact that natural resources would always remain under the control of the central authority. We have said all these things and more *ad nauseam*, until we are sick of repeating them. But Francophones, like retarded but stubborn children, don't seem to be listening. Or else they are listening without understanding.

But, if Francophones are deaf, they certainly are not dumb. In fact, they monopolize all the talking. A single Anglophone called Simon Munzu was accidentally given "la parole" on one single occasion and see the "damage" he caused by stating our case very simply and straightforwardly. Ever since that event, the whole propaganda arsenal of the regime has been mobilized to counteract Munzu's devastating performance - to no avail. Ever since, we have seen Gustave Essaka who charges Anglophones with selfishness without it ever occurring to him that the selfishness might actually be on his own side. We have both seen and heard venerable Charles Assale and Madam Madeleine Bono Samba who both lied shamelessly. We have heard Ngolle Ngolle (beware of people whose first name repeats itself! - Messi Messi, Alhaji Alhaji, Mballa Mballa, etc.) who thoroughly disgraced himself. But we've not been allowed another chance to put in even a single word.

Imagine for yourself what the situation would be if we had free and equal access to the public mass media. I have said it before in this column that all one needs to do to accurately monitor the democratization process in Cameroon is simply to observe the CRTV. There is no doubt that what the ruling regime still has left is the CRTV and its iron determination to stay on in power, come rain come shine. Cameroon calling (CC) of today, Sunday 13th June 1993,

was rudely yanked off the air midway because some Anglophone parliamentarians were rather cautiously and timidly trying to express the wishes of those they are supposed to be representing regarding the draft constitution. Well, we hope that these honourable parliamentarians who have along been trying to eat their cake and still have it, running with the game and pursuing with the hunters, would learn the correct lessons from the incident.

The “large débat” has come and gone. What has it achieved? Nothing, as we predicted before it even started. Prof. Owona, who started the “débat” by boldly lying, has ended it in like manner by boldly lying. He has confirmed his wishy-washy draft in all its essentials and claims that is the wish of the majority of Cameroonians. He says the AAC draft could not be taken into consideration because those who submitted it were not present, and you cannot discuss with absentees. Were the majority of Cameroonians whose views he claims are reflected in his final document present before their views were taken into consideration? The answer is blowing in the wind.

The New Deal regime of Dr. Paul Biya does not yet seem to be aware of what I described before as the limits of fraud, the limits of cajolery, intimidation, coercion, the limits of sheer physical force. We should all start seriously preparing for the Sovereign National Conference.

Published June 15-19, 1993

A Most Incredible Country, Cameroon

I once wrote a piece in this column entitled “Le Cameroun c’est le Cameroun” In that piece I tried to capture some of the incredible things that can happen in this country which could never happen anywhere else on earth. Every day things happen in this country that can shock any sane person to a point of insanity.

As far back as mid-July 1992, (see NO TRIFLING MATTER of July 9-16, 1992) the son of GOBATA had promised to put together the essays that have been written under this column since 1990 for your reading pleasure. You can bear me out that I always keep my promises, unlike some people such as you very well know who make sweet-sounding empty promises without any intention of ever keeping them. In spite of formidable material obstacles, I kept my promise made on the occasion cited above. *THE PAST TENSE OF SHIT (BOOK ONE)* is a collection of everything I have written under this column, arranged in chronological order, from my “Open Letter to Pa Foncha” in October 1990 up to “Punishing the Innocent, Rewarding Criminals” in December 1992.

Launching ceremonies for this collection of essays, which have individually all passed through the censorship before, were to begin in Yaounde yesterday, 18th June 1993. But this incredible New Deal regime of Dr. Paul Biya moved in, not only to foil the launching, but to waylay and seize

the books on the way from the printers. The question I ask myself is: "Are these people afraid of their own shadows or is it just pure bad faith?" Maybe some of my pieces are stinging. I don't know. But if they are, that is what they are meant to be. My ambition is to be a gadfly in our very transitional situation. In any case, I have on several occasions proclaimed myself willing and ready to be treated with the same medicine that I administer to others. This very column would happily publish any criticism of the son of GOBATA, no matter from where it comes. If you find any falsehoods here, carefully uncover and debunk them. It is very unfair, in the absence of any point of substance on which to pick a quarrel, to resort to strange underhand methods.

The letter of the parish priest of Christ the King's Parish, Tsinga, denying use of its hall at the 12th hour for the launching of the book, states that the prefectorial authorities of Yaoundé deduced from *"la nature des personnalités qui y sont invitées"* that the purported launching had a *"caractère nettement politique"*. This is a monstrous deduction no matter which way you look at it. Political considerations did not come in at all. People were invited in their personal recognizance and those invited actually belonged to all political parties indiscriminately. Among those to have been on the high table for the evening was one prominent member of the central committee of the CPDM, one prominent member of the SDF and several aligned and non-aligned senior citizens. Why then was the Parish priest blackmailed into cancelling the contract for the hall at the last minute? The answer is blowing in the wind.

For three decades we have been boldly pretending in this country. It may just be dawning on both Anglophones and Francophones that they are very strange bed-fellows. While Francophones generally seem to take this sort of violation of fundamental human rights as rather in the nature of things, Anglophones generally find it a very bitter pill to

swallow. I was surprised to notice that some people showed up for the aborted launching as early as 5.00 p.m. for a ceremony programmed to begin at 7:00 p.m. And some stayed there in spite of the sabotage discussing until after 10.00 p.m. It was with considerable difficulty that we convinced some people who were insisting that the ceremony should go ahead even in the open air.

Events like this really sharpen the contradictions within which we have been living and the future of this country remains most unpredictable. How can we really explain the fact that Cameroon was recently “elected” into the executive of the United Nations’ Human Rights Commission? It is most ironic and shows that the outside world has scarcely an iota of a notion about what goes on here. The Secretary General of the Commonwealth may be flying in here today to see for himself if Cameroon is fit to be a member of the Commonwealth. If he were to know about some of the happenings that happen here, do you think it would help our case for membership into such a decent association? Answer honestly.

As soon as the publication of this collection of essays was announced, many people had complained about the title. But now judge for yourself if it is not symbolically very appropriate. Sam Nuvela Fonkem had angrily remarked: “Rotcod, you call this THE PAST TENSE OF SHIT? This is THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE OF SHIT! I only laughed. But later I discovered that Ntemfac Ofeye, the Editor-in-Chief of CAMPOST, had actually entitled his key-note address for the launching that never happened: THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE OF SHIT.

Published June 23-28, 1993

From My Mail Bag

The philosophy underlying NO TRIFLING MATTER is very much centred around the idea of criticism (including both negative and positive appraisal) as the only way by which we, as fallible human beings, can rapidly improve our lot in this world. If you have read the “Foreword” to THE PAST TENSE OF SHIT (Book One), you would already have an idea why the son of Gobata is rather allergic to congratulatory messages. My mail file is full of appreciative and congratulatory fan letters. I have usually simply noted them and then filed them away. What I have usually been on the lookout for, is informed criticism of my views or disagreement with the logic of my reasoning. It is such that I have promised to publish on this page, if the Editor of *Cameroon Post* does not publish it on the readers’ page. But it appears that those who disagree with me have not yet learned the democratic game of standing up to me in writing but prefer the underhand methods of putting stumbling blocks on my way or gagging me. While waiting for them to become more rational and reasonable, I have put my allergy in abeyance to publish here two recent items from my mail bag. The first is a letter from a senior citizen in the world of journalism, Jerome F. Gwellem, and the second is a good shitological poem written by a young man, Kikefomo Mbulai, after the foiled launching of my book in Yaounde and read during the successful launching of the same book in Buea on Friday, June 25th 1993.

Epistle To Gobata Shit Men After the Tsinga Affair

You roasted a lion's heart, spiced,
And after a fill of palm wine,
You served a virile plate of shit
To the lunatic, imperial coterie,
And in their wonted myopia,
They have fed on shit without end,
Pointing to their smeared, stinking robes
As marks of a thousand shades
Which they liberally sanction to thrive.

You served them a virile meal of shit
And now, roused from a somnolent spell,
By the delicate fragrance of your synoptic
Scrolls of shit, which risk infecting
A crowed world with militant drives
Their couriers frantically pen the edict
Of interdiction to thirsty saxonites

Carrying your toxic scrolls of shit,
You return, unprodigal, to the cradle,
From the Ngola intellectual Wilderness
To exorcise these rheumatic seasons that
Plague the polity. You return then with
Doses of shitolatum to administer
On this trodden lotheirs of the saner days
Of Tiko Mountain slope politics, now crawling,
Utterly broken by a three-decade nurture
On the heaps of dung indignantly pumped
From the ultra-concentrated nerve-centre
Which in naïve faith, their fathers
Hastily bound them to.

Mouthful of your curative shit
We will of course heartily consume
As we languish in these forlorn chimes,
In search of purgatives to rid
Our infested stomachs of Gallic worms
Bred by the chagrin of this
Painful conjugal of thralldom

You devoured a lion's heart
And served them a bowl of healing shit
And blind, they slam it on your face
Make you just wak de ting now broadal
After all dem go continue-shuffering and shmling

Kikefomo Mbulai

June 24, 1992

June 23, 1993

My dear Rotcod Gobata,

I write to thank you, very sincerely, for your interesting book: "THE PAST TENSE OF SHIT (Book one)" a copy of which you kindly autographed to me.

You may not believe that in reading the book I am convulsed with fits of laughter. You cannot help laughing at Rene Owona's Cellucam Scandal; Paul Biya's panel beaters etc.

I have not known you before. Recently I tried to find you at the Liberty Spot, Yaounde, but you had left.

What interests me very much are: your style of presentation; your keen and meticulous observation of details; your apt description of those you encounter in each topic.

Anyone reading your description of the hungry looks of Rene Owona would attest to this fact.

I have been a keen reader of your column since it began in the "Cameroon Post," and I preserve all its copies.

Your decision to combine the series in a book is commendable.

From my library I picked out "The Bedside Guardian" which I bought in Britain in 1978. I am sure you have either read or heard of the "The Guardian" newspaper which is now about 175 years old. I thought "The Bedside Guardian" which is a collection of articles by its columnists between 1971-72, would be of interest to you.

I send it as a token of my appreciation to you. I wish to congratulate you for fighting the gallant crusade against the enemies of change and pray that you continue the battle for a true democratisation of Cameroon society.

Thank you, I am,

Jerome F. Gwellem, DIRECTOR CIJ, LIMBE

Published July 5, 1993

The Media and the Democratic Process in Cameroon

Is there a “democratic process” in Cameroon? This straightforward and innocent looking question is very difficult to answer. The “New Deal” regime of Dr. Paul Biya would have the world believe that there is a democratization process in Cameroon, initiated by the author (not necessarily the writer) of *Communal Liberalism*. Recently they have even been announcing the payment of “compensation” to “victims” of “democratization.”

Recently again, the dynamic and young Director of the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation here in Yaounde organized a two-day seminar at Hilton Hotel (June 23-24, 1993) under the theme: “The Role of the Media in the Democratic Process in Cameroon.” Mr. Michael Hackenbruch, the said Director of the said Foundation, deserves a red feather for merely performing the feat of bringing together around a discussion table such very strange be-fellows as Albert Mbida, Tjade Eone, Charles Ndongo, Pius Njawe, Gregoire Owona, Charly Gabriel Mbock, Eric Chinje, Severin Tchounkeu etc. You can always trust the Germans for their bold and firm ventures and for their readiness to put their money where their mouth is. I remember our last presidential “elections” which were marred by massive fraud, irregularities, controversies and violence. It was clear to anyone with the interest of this country at heart that the only right thing to have done within those circumstances was to repeat the elections more carefully. While the other

“friendly nations” were merely and vaguely calling for “reconciliation and dialogue,” the Germans loudly and clearly declared that they were willing and ready to finance a repeat of the presidential elections.

The son of Gobata was also invited to the above seminar and was surprised to find everybody talking rather glibly about the “democratic process” in Cameroon, as if it is very obvious that there is a democratic process in Cameroon. If there is a democratic process in Cameroon, when did it begin and who initiated it? As recently as March 1990, militants of the monolithic CPDM party and supporters of the Biya dynasty were out on the streets demonstrating against democracy. A pontifical high mass was even offered and celebrated in Yaounde against democracy.

Human beings, from time immemorial, have always mistaken appearances for reality, form for content. This is what has happened with democracy with reference to Cameroon. We have all mistaken talk about democracy for democracy itself. Like children who may mistake a doll for a baby. Faithful readers of *NO TRIFLING MATTER* know very well that the son of Gobata believes that there is a DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE but, as yet, no democratic process in Cameroon. The struggle was publicly launched at Ntarikon Park, Bamenda, on May 26th 1990, by the simple but charismatic bookseller, Ni John Fru Ndi. Ever since, the struggle has had many a set-back and registered countless martyrs.

Regarding the media, has there been any positive change since 1990? Let us leave aside the private media and consider only the public media, funded by the common tax payer. Private individuals could establish media of mass communication for all sorts of reasons. As long as it is their money they have put into it, they would always want to manipulate it to the best of their own personal advantage. But one thing is clear: any medium of communication whose

chief aim is partisan propaganda without respect for truth would neither be credible nor convincing. Just take a newspaper like *Le Patriote* for example. As far back as October 1990, I remarked that *Le Patriote* (Then *Le Democrate*) seemed to be gunning for the unenviable title of “defender of public thieves.” Today, the orchestrated “refutations” of *Le Patriote* are the best index of the blunders and attempted cover-ups of the tribalized regime. Within the private media, let propaganda struggle against propaganda for our credibility.

The public media is a different cup of tea altogether. The general public is or ought to be the proprietor of the public media. The ethos of practice here must be different from what obtains within the privately-owned media. When the public media is hijacked for the propaganda of a handful of crooks, this is neither justifiable nor should it be accepted with resignation.

On May 26th 1990, the regime gunned down six innocent citizens and the public media boldly lied to the world that they were trampled to death by the feet of stampeded. The question I ask is: Has anything changed for the better within our public media since 1990? The answer is blowing in the wind. On March 25th this very year, armless, harmless peaceful demonstrators were again gunned down in Bamenda. The Governor of the North West Province said only a post mortem autopsy could determine whether they were not killed by dane guns. We are still waiting for the results of that autopsy. What of Kamga Collins, the student burnt to death at the University of Yaounde? Where is the result of the enquiry we were told was being conducted regarding his death? Has our public media become more or less democratic since 1990? Catch your own answer from the wind!

Published July 27, 1993

A Permanent State of Siege

If a foreigner were to visit Cameroon at the present moment, he or she would surely think that there is war in the country. The entire armed forces have been let loose on the hapless populations. The game has twin names: forceful collection of taxes and restoring *l'autorité de l'état*. We have treated these issues before. From the moment Dr. Biya lost and won the October 11th presidential elections, anybody could have predicted the shape of things to come. In October 1992, *NO TRIFLING MATTER* asked the following hypothetical question: "Suppose Biya takes the courage of the lion without the common sense of the fox and imposes himself on the Cameroonian people (like a jigger stuck in the toe), how does he hope to be able to govern for five years? By ruthless repression?"

The hypothetical question was in fact an unwitting prophecy. The consolidation of Biya's "victory" in the 11 October presidential elections is what is directly responsible for the hell we are all going through now. And the trend will surely continue for the foreseeable future, it seems. All imaginable and even unimaginable gimmicks have been tried. To no avail. But, with the almighty French at hand, there are no limits to try-able options. Our descent into hell is an unstoppable free fall.

Have you moved around recently? Even within the city. There are gun-totting members of the armed forces at every street corner, extorting their 500 francs from taxi drivers and private motorists alike. No monkey business. Any attempt to dodge and they open fire. Just like that!

I recently travelled from Yaounde to Victoria by bus. Before we had done 20 kilometres out of Yaounde, we had been stopped at 8 checkpoints. And they would come up, guns and all, and inspect everybody minutely. If you hadn't your tax receipts you were just bundled out. At Tiko I saw something. Gendarmes trying to beat a 15 year old boy to death. They had ordered him to roll in murky water. But that was not enough for them. They were beating him with belts and smashing his ribs with their boots. His crime: trying to make a living out of selling *funge* alias *fédérale*. Is there any other country on earth where 15 year-olds, instead of hunting lizards or playing in the parks, are constrained to handle such a highly inflammable and dangerous substance as a way of making a living? Is such highly brutal treatment commensurate to the crime, if crime it be? The answers are blowing in the wind.

There is a vegetable called *Eru* which most Cameroonian women, learning from the Bayangis, use to prepare a delicacy. I saw them seizing and destroying sac-loads of *Eru* which were probably heading for Douala and Yaounde. Is *Eru* also smuggled in from Nigeria? That is the question that was on my mind. But I later heard that the reason is connected with protection of the environment. Can you beat that? Our forests have been handed over to the French to completely deplete and destroy and carry to France, which is now allegedly recognized in Europe as the greatest exporter of tropical wood. No one thinks, let alone talks, about protection of the environment. Nearly all our cities are drowning under garbage. Environmental protection does not occur to anybody. It is preventing people from eating *Eru* and water-foofoo that will protect the environment!?

Very soon, ordinary pedestrians will be stopped on the streets at gun point and asked to show not only tax receipts but receipts for any items of clothing they happen to be wearing. That is our journey into hell on which we embarked

one fine day in October 1992. The nasty gashes that have been inflicted on our collective psyche in less than a year are such that we would need decades to recover from them. Ten years ago, who would have believed some of the things now happening in Cameroon?

Is it so long ago that we used to listen with open-mouthed wonderment at tales of robberies, lynching and senseless murders from other lands? A few days ago, right here in Yaounde, someone cut off a lady's arm. Well, he didn't, by any chance, need the arm for anything. What he needed was the handbag on the arm. And for that he chopped off the whole arm, little calculating that the handbag might, in fact, contain only lip stick and menstrual cotton-pads. He was, of course, not lucky enough to live to find out what the handbag actually contained. An alarm was quickly raised and he was lynched to death by burning. This is no longer an isolated case. In his case it may be hard to sympathize. But, in some other cases, it may be enough to simply shout Thief! Thief!!! for an innocent person to be lynched to death.

I have said it before that any government that is incapable of doing something about the situations described above should just do one honourable thing: *BOW OUT OF STAGE*.

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The French Connection

All neo-colonial nations - Britain, France, Germany, the USA etc., share the same ultimate aim, namely, exploitation of the unexploited parts of the physical universe for their benefit. In pursuing this common aim, they sometimes find themselves in bitter rivalry with each other but, more often, in mutually beneficial co-operation. It is in the light of such mutually beneficial co-operation that they have divided the so-called third world, especially Africa, among themselves into exclusive “spheres of influence.” You would realize that robbers are never so fair and honest as when it comes to sharing some common booty among themselves.

But even though all neo-colonialists have the same ultimate aim, they differ markedly in their respective *modus operandi* – the method, style and manner used to achieve that aim. For some reason that I have never really had the time to try to fathom, English people have more moral scruples than their other comrades in neo-colonialism. The French, by contrast, are the most shamelessly qualmless, or if you prefer, qualmlessly shameless. Both the Germans and the Americans would seem to have struck a workable compromise between qualmlessness and a certain measure of moral sensitivity.

The English have always been obsessed with the idea of being a “gentleman.” The only thing needed to secure the British Prime Minister’s resignation is for some scruffy-looking damsel to show up and claim that he once “made a pass” at her. But in France, sex scandals involving politicians are virtually unknown. As someone has explained, “the

reason is that having a mistress in France is rather like running a second car or joining the golf club. It is a status symbol, it is expected. If a photograph of Mitterrand's mistress were splashed over the front pages of the newspapers there would be a national yawn. If she was pretty he might go up a couple of points in the polls."

But before this line takes us too far afield, let us get back to our French connection. Among the world powers presiding over human destiny, it is accepted that Cameroon falls under the sphere of influence of the French. The present socio-politico-economic mess in which Cameroon finds itself can neither be understood nor explained without reference to the French factor in Cameroonian affairs. And, in considering the French connection, we must be careful not to confuse description with prescription.

Whether we like it or not, whether justifiable or not, the fact is that Cameroon is under the strangle iron-grip of French neo-colonialism. A little more than three decades ago, they exterminated whole villages here to further their politico-economic interests. Today they would be willing and ready to do same for the same reason. Unless, of course, Cameroonians were to stand up like one man to say "No more! Enough is enough!!" But this is not possible because Cameroon is overwhelmingly composed of little Frenchmen, pupils of French mentors, called Francophones who believe that without the French they are "finished."

Our last presidential elections were a bumper scandal which shocked everybody including all the super powers, excluding only France which in its ruthless qualmlessness had decided the outcome before hand and asked the incumbent, in line with the logic of that decision, to present himself as a lion. We are in the mess in which we find ourselves today for three principal reasons, viz: the French connection, the policy of non-interference in the exclusive sphere of influence among the neo-colonial powers and the Francophone factor in the Cameroonian situation.

Geo-politically and economically Cameroon is evidently very important to the French. Nevertheless, in trying to protect their immediate and short-term interests by sustaining the incumbent ruinous regime, they may, without realizing the fact, be subverting their long-term interests.

It would also be myopic for those of us struggling for positive change in Cameroon to think that we could, even with a change of regime, simply say *shege* and get rid of the French.. As a nation, our involvement with the French is so long and so deep that any abrupt severance of ties would be mutually harmful. If this were realized on both sides, it would be quite possible to strike an acceptable compromise between the French and the forces of positive change in Cameroon.

The problem, however, is that, as the chief national characteristic of the French is eating and drinking, there is very little time left to think about or even to think at all of long term interests. And nothing better can be expected from their pupils since the disciple can never be more than the master. So we are shipwrecked in an impasse in which we are staring at only one side of the coin without the possibility of advancing in a positive direction. And, talking about the other side of the coin, reminds me of the many people who last week expressed surprise and even indignation at the pomp and pageantry with which the 1st anniversary of Madam Biya's death was celebrated. Well, they failed to look at the other side of the coin. The first anniversary of the death of Mrs. Biya is also the first anniversary of the widower-hood of her husband. Get the point? But to go back to the French, they don't think at all. Honestly. If you don't believe me, you don't need to go to France to find out. Go to the French Consulate here in Yaounde. You will be shocked at what you see or experience.

No details for now.

Published August 11, 1993

A Day at the French Embassy

Last time I was saying that if you went to the French Consulate right here in Yaounde you would learn something about the unreasoning nature, disorderliness and general mediocrity of the French. This situation is the secret behind the fact that they shout a lot, wave their arms in the air when they talk, and use excessive brute force to achieve any of their aims which run up against the slightest obstacle. Because they don't reason (what an irony that it was one of their philosophers who made the famous statement: COGITO ERGO SUM- I think therefore I am!) they hate arguments like the plague. Just try to argue a point with a French man or woman and he or she would immediately bang the door in your face. Such are the most remarkable attributes that the French bequeathed to their African pupils and apprentices, otherwise known as Francophones.

Biya Bi Mvondo , in spite of his penchant for gathering honorary doctorates around the globe is evidently terrified of the prospect of having to sit down face to face and argue a point with a simple Cameroonian like the bookseller of Bamenda. It is not surprising that Ni John Fru Ndi's repeated calls for dialogue have always gone unheeded. It can be expected that the latest overture of the Chairman from the SDF Convention in Bafoussam will equally go unheeded.

I was saying something about the French Consulate in Yaounde. One day I had the misfortune of going to ask for a visa at the French Consulate. I was not going to France. I was going to the UK. But since all flights are purposely

arranged to pass through Paris, I was told I needed a transit visa through France. When Cameroon Airlines was handed over to French management some time ago, did I not predict that it would be completely ruined? What is the reality today? Find out for yourself. The first thing the French manager of CAMAIR did was to cancel direct flights to London. That way all passengers would depend on Air France for going to the UK as well as paying for transit visas through France. Who says French people don't know how to butter their bread on both sides?

The day I went to the French Consulate for a transit visa, I arrived there at 7:30 am to discover that there was already a long queue of visa seekers outside the gate. I took my place on the queue. The gate was not opened until 8:30 am. People rushed in and were asked by one of the "guardiens" to go and sit under some shed and await further orders. What was the earlier queuing at the gate for? Ask me. Later they came and distributed some numbers, randomly, so that most of those who were just arriving got the first numbers and some of those who had come first got some of the last numbers. By mid-day I managed to get the visa form which is what all the waiting was for. I had to go and complete the form and bring it back the next day with a long list of documents and fees for the visa. I did, and the same scenario of the previous day repeated itself. At last my "dossier" was examined by some extremely rude little girl who asked me to come back the next day at precisely 11:00 am for the visa. I went back as instructed. Then a curious thing happened. When it was my turn at the window they went through the pile of passports and announced to me that my passport was not there and I should come again the next day. Very gently I was trying to explain that my flight was the very next day from Douala, when the window was banged shut in my face.

The next day I was there at 7:30 am with my luggage and all, ready to go straight from there to Douala. I was told that withdrawal of passports could not be done before 11:00 am. I begged, I explained, I pleaded. To no avail. I decided I did not want their visa any more, let them just give me back my passport. The window banged in my face again. I kept my cool and waited till 11:00 am. When I finally got to the window they went through the pile of passports, as my heart was racing and blood pressure rising, and announced to me that my passport was not there. Could I, please, come back in three days' time so that they could have time to search in their computer? "Jesus of Jebako!" I exclaimed in English. I was issuing an ultimatum when the window was banged in my face once more. For the first time in life, the son of Gobata lost his cool and calm. Like Samson, I pounded on the window, nearly bringing down the building. Had the broom stick passing for a French woman been within reach, it is doubtful that I would have refrained from committing my first murder. You wouldn't believe it, but the window opened and duologue, if not quite dialogue began. A more careful search revealed my passport right there in the pile. The problem, it was now kindly explained to me, was that the identity card I produced bore the name Rotcod Gobata whereas the passport bore Gobata Rotcod. Imagine! Could such a thing have happened at the British, German or American Embassy?

I sped out from there with only two and a half hours separating me from the take off of my flight in Douala. I hired the first "clando" I met. I still would not have made it had God not been on my side. He delayed the flight for more than an hour and when it finally took off I was in the plane.

The feigned politeness of the pretty stewardesses meant nothing to me. I kept reflecting on the sheer incompetence of the French and finally understood why they have always

been humiliated by the Germans in all their historical encounters. These are the fellows whose pupils and apprentices are running our lives. Any wonder that we are saddled with a president who virtually lives abroad and runs the country by remote control and who shows callous indifference to the daily massacre of innocent citizens?

Published August 23, 1993

The Limits of Demagogic Madness

Even before the ruination of the defunct *Marketing Board* (RIP), coffee and cocoa prices had started falling in the world market. One year around the early eighties, the government found that it had to drastically reduce the price per kilogram that it had usually paid to farmers of these crops. One would have thought that a simple, clear, careful explanation to the farmers, of the unpalatable situation in the world market, no fault of the government, was enough. But no. The government thought that its action must further be seen as a highly patriotic move made in the interest of the farmers themselves. So government officials drafted “motions of support and congratulations” to the government for reducing the price of cocoa and coffee. These were read over the radio, day in day out, and attributed to farmers from various constituencies of the monolithic party. That was when demagoguery, which has always been part and parcel of the political system of our Banana Republic, reached its high water mark. Since then it has intensified, under the impulse of kleptocracy and repression, to a point of sheer madness.

NO TRIFLING MATTER has noted it before and will repeat it again: our radio and television are no more than the propaganda instruments at the service of demagoguery run riot. Once you notice something being feverishly orchestrated over radio and television, you should take a healthy pinch of snuff. A member of the ruling clique would simply go to the radio or television house, sit down and

write whatever he likes and then give it to be read and attributed to whoever he likes. The post presidential electoral communiqué of “all the people of South West Province” as well as that of the “Elites of North West Province” were paradigms in this regard.

So also is the recent communiqué of the “Elites and Chiefs of South West Province” against the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM). I haven’t gone to CRTV to find out. I don’t need to. It is as clear as day on the basis of consolidated practice. The language is even unmistakably familiar. It is the same author who wrote the post electoral communiqué and the “resolutions” of the Mamfe South West Chiefs meeting. The author of these outrageous releases and the small band of his accomplices, collaborators and supporters (if any) certainly has a cause to protect or fight for, or both. That is their right in the democratic society that we are fighting for. What is not their right is to engage in reprehensible fraud and blatant lying simply because they happen to monopolize the control of all media of mass communication.

The Governor of the South West Province was acting well within his prerogatives to issue an order banning the proposed CAM meeting in Buea, even if he hadn’t given any reasons for the ban. (Those he gave are far-fetched, fraudulent and libellous). It was up to the members of CAM to decide whether they were sufficiently intimidated to abandon their proposed meeting. What is absolutely unacceptable is that a release written by one individual should be fraudulently attributed to a whole province and to individuals who neither composed nor signed it, even if they would have agreed with it. Every adult must stand by his/her own views and ideas. You can’t just sit down and write anything and, without my knowledge and consent, put my name there as having written it with you. Even if I agree with what you have written, the procedure would still be unacceptable.

Notice that these demagogic releases are usually first and more widely diffused in French even though they may concern only Anglophones exclusively. Of what concern to any Francophone is a meeting of CAM in Buea that a release about it should first and more widely be disseminated in French? Is this not rather a means for the authors of these outrages to draw the attention of their paymasters that they are earning their keep? The problems facing Anglophones as a distinct entity within this country are common and well known although there may be no unanimity as to how they are to be solved. Some Francophone who has been swallowing the recent demagogic propaganda without a pinch of salt was asking me if war would not break out between the Northwest and Southwest Provinces one of these days. I told him there was absolutely no reason even for a small quarrel to break out, that in the past three decades Northwesterners and Southwesterners had never been more unanimous about their common aims and objectives; and that, if he doubted me, he should take a trip to the Southwest Province which has been portrayed as the complainant and talk to ordinary *bona fide* Southwesterners.

On Friday 20/08/93, we did NOT hear the Chairman of the GCE Commission, Professor Sondegam, on the 6 o'clock news in English but we heard him loud and clear on the 6:30 news in French. He was speaking in (comprehensible) French! And giving assurances of the government's good intentions vis-à-vis the GCE imbroglio. What concerns Francophones and the GCE? Should Professor Sondegam not rather have been talking to GCE markers, to the Teachers Association of Cameroon (TAC), to Anglophone parents of GCE candidates and to Anglophones in general? The answer may be blowing in the wind. But we must learn to recognize demagoguery when we come across it in its diverse forms.

Published August 23, 1993

War in “Bagdad”

The last time I visited “Bagdad” was in December 1992. At that time, if my memory serves me right, Dr Paul Biya, “the president of all Cameroonians without exception” had slammed a state of emergency on the North West Province and gone to frolick in some quiet European city under the familiar rubric “short private visit” (or is it “private short visit”?). So the son of Gobata also decided to go on his own short private visit, but to the North West Province to see for himself how the Province was faring under the state of emergency. On that occasion I ended up spending Christmas in Bagdad (see NO TRIFLING MATTER of December 29, 1992) which as you very well know (unless you are a “yamhead” which I don’t believe you are) is what Bui Division of the North West Province is fondly called. It earned this enviable title from its unwavering tenacity and commitment to the cause of change and democratization in Cameroon. The architect of democratic change in Cameroon, Ni John Fru Ndi, often refers to Bui Division as his “right arm.” The people of Bui Division share one among many common characteristics to which Christian missionaries can testify: once convinced of an idea, they defend it with the zeal of fanatics and are willing and ready to lay down their lives for it, if necessary.

The topography and climatic conditions of Bui Division, with steep hills and deep valleys, extremes of heat and cold, rain and sunshine, wetness and dryness, dust and mud, are such that the area can breed very few weaklings. Culturally too, the people are brought up never to turn their backs to

challenges and dangers. One striking cultural practice of the people of this area which they share with the people of Donga – Mantung Division and, I suspect, with all the so-called “graffi” people is that when an adult saw two youngsters quarrelling, he didn’t usually try to make peace between them but, instead, encouraged them to fight. He would grab some soil or dust in both hands and shake in his open palms while challenging each of the prospective combatants. Beating off the contents of one of the palms was a sign of readiness for the combat. The elder would then take a comfortable seat and act as the referee of the fight, making sure that none of the combatants used “dirty tricks” and that no one was killed or badly wounded in the fight. This is a very odd practice which must have arisen against a background where physical and moral strength were important, where war was rampant and determined not only what you got but whether you kept what you already had. This scenario must be the reason why real cowards are somehow rare in these areas.

Sorry for the long digression. What I set out to say was simply that I was recently on another “short private visit” to the area under focus. I quietly returned yesterday, 26/08/93 and, today, I should have been commenting on so many things but there is war in “Bagdad.” I should have been commenting today on Dr. Biya’s New Deal Regime’s panicky reaction in the face of the symbolic two-day strike called for 30th and 31st August by the Union For Change. Suddenly, the President of the Republic has decided that all other Cameroonians are equal with members of the armed forces! Now we are really beginning to get somewhere. Those fellows in uniform should soon expect their own pay cut which must be back-dated to when everybody else’s started. Now salaries are to be paid to everybody all over the national territory at the same time and the long suffering Cameroonian students in foreign lands are to be paid their

dues, on the instructions of his Excellency to their excellencies. So it was simply a matter of instructions that were lacking and not shortage of cash as they were deceiving us to believe? Or did Oga bring back “something” from; his most recent “short-private, private-short visit to obodo oyinbo? Has he started chipping bits from the 2000 billion dollars in his personal accounts? Your guess is as good as mine.

After threats and ultimatums which were completely null and void and of no consequence whatsoever, the government has finally done what it should have done long ago: created a committee to elaborate the details of application of the decree creating the G.C.E (C.E.B?) board as demanded by TAC. Well, they are slowly learning that Anglophones are not Francophones. We can recognize about four members of the announced committee on whom we have confidence. We must provisionally consider the rest as government stooges until they prove otherwise. But all will depend on the text they elaborate. Maybe Mbella (the honourable) has already prepared it for them to simply sign, Owona-fashion.

I might even have taken a critical notice of Thaddy Menang who put aside his snuff cup briefly last week to welcome the S.D.F. to “real politik” or Rose Abunaw’s mediocre performance over T.V. on Bello Bouba’s (or is it Bouba Bello’s?) party slot. The U.N. D.P. (dixit Rose) doesn’t want people to protest even when cheated, no woman should “naked herself” for any leader and Rose doesn’t like prostitution. These issues must await future treatment because there is war in “Bagdad.”

The war which broke out on 15/08/93 over farmlands between the people of the Nso village of Buh and the people Djottin-Noni raged on for over a week without the government doing anything to stop it until Ni John Fru Ndi arrived there on 24/08/93. People are never so ready to go

to war or risk death as when it concerns a parcel of land, and two otherwise closely related communities can easily manoeuvre themselves into a situation of war from a dispute over a strip of land. Especially if age-old grudges and animosities lie dormant just below the surface. This is what happened between Buh and Djottin-Noni. And the thing to have done in that situation was to have stepped in swiftly and promptly and douse the flames before a raging conflagration ensued.

But we understand that in high government circles they said both combatants were enemies of the regime and should eliminate themselves if they liked. But the pretext was “let them settle it themselves.” The Bishop of Kumbo diocese, the Pastor of the area, rushed to the troubled spot immediately the conflict erupted but the SDO of the place hadn’t the courage to follow the Bishop right to the spot. He stayed away on a safe neighbouring hill, ready to run for dear life at the approach of any trouble. When Ni John arrived on the early morning of 24/08/93, he first called on the SDO to tell him about his intention to go and sue for peace in the troubled area but, on the instructions of his superiors in Bamenda and Yaoundé, the SDO bluntly prohibited him from going, pretending considerations for Ni John’s personal safety. Did he think the man who launched the SDF on 26th May 1990 against the combined might of the Cameroonian armed forces would be deterred from going to impose peace amongst a people who consider him as little less than a god? To Djottin Fru Ndi went and peace he imposed. May the belligerents keep their pledges to their leader! Come to think of it, does Dr. Paul Biya even know, let alone care, that there was war in “Bagdad”? There are leaders and there are leaders.

Published September 1-7, 1993

The Well Deserved Mockery of A People by its Own Leaders

Last week, the war in “Baghdad” prevented me from fully appreciating Dr. Biya’s instructions to their honourable excellencies: Achidi Achu, Antoine Ntsimi and Mbella Mbappe, regarding the payment of salaries and re-opening of schools. I have once been falsely accused of witchcraft by some readers of this column. But today, I myself am strongly suspecting my brother and next-door neighbour, *The Postman*, of being a wizard. When the presidential order on salaries was released and loudly and repeatedly diffused over all arms of the public mass media, I felt cocksure that the salaries would be paid as ordered by His Excellency, although I could only speculate as to where the money would be coming from. How could I have known that the President of the Republic might just be trifling with 12 million Cameroonians? But it is now crystal clear that Dr. Biya was only playing games with a tragically gullible people. The immediate and only aim of the salaries announcement was to counteract the August 30th -31st general strike called by the UNION FOR CHANGE.

And that is where the witchcraft of my brother, *The Postman*, comes in. When the announcement was made, we both agreed that it was a strategy against the strike and that credit should therefore go but to the legitimate President in Ntarikon palace. But *The Postman* was further quite sure that the money would not be paid. With calm confidence, he asserted that the whole thing was a hoax, a dud cheque;

that there was no money in sight and that even if the fellow had won a jackpot during his latest short-private visit in one of the casinos of Beverly Hills, he would know better what to do with it. How right he was. But how did he manage to know this with such cocksureness? If he is not a wizard then it must be that he knows Bi Mvondo even better than myself who thought I knew him like the back of my hand.

There is someone who owes me ten thousand francs and, since last week, I have been following him around so that as soon as he got his July salary, I could do my own "*recouvrement forcé*" immediately. So far, all he has succeeded getting is a yellow piece of paper called "*bon de caisse*." No cash in sight. And we are here talking in September about July salary. These days Cameroonians seem to be talking only salaries and money and salaries and money. The other day at a cocktail party, I overheard an American diplomat telling a University of Yaounde I professor: "With the cost of living here so high, how on earth are you living without your salary? I was in Paris before coming here and, by comparison, I find the cost of living here really high. I can't imagine going without my salary for a single month. And you continue going to work? Back in America, if people were to go without pay for a month, the government would surely be sent packing immediately." His interlocutor only said: "We Cameroonians are very patient."

Well, I don't believe Cameroonians are patient. Cameroonians are foolish. If not, tell me why a jobless person, without any prospect of a job in the foreseeable future, would receive one thousand francs and accept to march 15 kilometres to go and congratulate the President for (falsely) promising to pay someone else?! Garga Haman Adji has pointed out (See *Le Chemin*, No 001 of 23rd August, 1993) that in Cameroon history, both colonial and post colonial, it is under Mr. Biya that Cameroonian civil servants have ever gone without salaries at the end of the month

(now at the end of several months). Garga thinks that Biya should have quit the moment it first happened. He is right. But, apparently, when Biya looks at his other comrades in dictatorship, Sese Seko Mobutu of Zaire, Nyasingbe Eyadema of Togo, etc., and sees how far they have been able to go, he believes that he still has a lot of mileage before him. From the moment Cameroonians let him get away with the trophy of the October 11th 1992 presidential elections, he knew he could get away with anything.

The promise of salaries to civil servants and scholarship money to Cameroonian students chaffing in foreign lands is a way of poking fun at a spineless people. Cameroonians fully deserve it. Let them suffer in total silence. From now on, anybody complaining to my hearing about salary, Biya, this and that, risks receiving a dirty slap from me. Do you think if Nigerians, our next door neighbours, had folded their arms and only been grumbling privately, their own dictator, Babangida, would have vacated his imperial throne?

As for Pa Foch, my hand is half-way up to my hat. I will surely doff my hat to him for that Churchill drama, if and when the main character, the gendarme officer who allegedly masterminded and organized the murder, appears on stage. He holds the key to the mysterious murder. It is quite unlike Pa to stop his investigations mid-way and call in the CRTV, even if he already has the haunch, as he says, that the fellow simply called “Jim” is a fictive character. We need to see “Jim” face to face and also hear something from his own mouth because we still remember those Bali-Kumbat detainees (Check NO TRIFLING MATTER of December 2-9, 1992). By the way, could a similar thing not be done in the case of the student, Kamba Collins? Or is the plot of that one far too complicated?

In any case, my hand is suspended in mid-air to doff my hat to Pa Foch. I note (parenthetically) that he calls the UNION FOR CHANGE, UNION FOR CHANGE and

describes it correctly as “the radical opposition.” This is a clear departure from official policy which requires that it be referred to vaguely as “*une certaine opposition*.” But a really good and competent player can often defy the coach because he knows, as his Excellency, Kontchou, once remarked, that, as a good player, he can play in any team. Pa Foch would never lack a team. For starters, he could set up a drama company.

Published September 8-15, 1993

Who is the Head of the Catholic Church in Cameroon?

This is the foolish question which the CRTV took down to the man on the street last Sunday, September 5th 1993, under the variety programme TAM-TAM WEKEND. To this foolish question many foolish answers were given, that of the Professor who is said to have proposed the question being the foolishest of all. Well, we should not blame anyone, especially an ordinary man on the street, for giving a foolish answer to a foolish question. But what are we to say about a Professor who not only sets a foolish question but proposes the foolishest answer to his own foolish question?

But before coming back to the above question, let us take a little time off to toast and doff our hats to TAC, Teachers' Association of Cameroon. It was because of TAC that a well-respected Francophone Professor (not the type who would ask a foolish question and then give the foolishest answer to his own question) exclaimed last week: "where would we be in this country without Anglophones?!" The learned Professor was very impressed by the tenacity and unanimity with which TAC has pursued its demands concerning the Cameroon Examinations Board (CEB). Neither bribes nor threats nor blackmail nor ultimatums could move TAC to abandon its very reasonable demands. The Prof. was quite convinced that, without the Anglophone factor, things would be much worse in Cameroon than they actually are, perhaps worser (please excuse the barbarism) than in Togo or Zaïre.

This Prof. certainly knew what he was talking about. After all, do University teachers, whom one would have expected have a very high bargaining power, have any association comparable to TAC? They started something called SYNES, but did it get off the ground? Is it not the Francophone factor, characterized by extreme timidity, inconstancy, inconsistency, treachery and double-dealing that has prevented SYNES from succeeding? It is some University teachers (who themselves should be members of SYNES) who arranged for the association to be banned. It is some University teachers who compiled the list of the active members of SYNES so that they could be attacked by “thieves” at night, transferred to Ngaoundere or their offices burnt by “students.” On the priority list prepared by the ruling junta for payment of salaries, University teachers are placed last. Today, (10/09/93) soldiers, who are first on the list, were said to be rioting in town for their August salaries. University teachers have not been paid since the month of May. But they are all busy correcting and compiling exams even on Saturdays and Sundays! Why wouldn’t they be jealous of TAC?

TAC has not only thoroughly thrashed the Hon. Minister of National Education, His Excellency Robert Mbella Mbappe, in hand to hand combat, but has rubbed his graying moustache in the mud. From growling and barking, Mbella descended to begging and pleading and ended up fully prostrated before TAC. As I am writing this, they are reading the news of Mbella Mbappe’s decree transferring the GCE marking centre in Yaounde to Buea as demanded by TAC. The traitors among the Anglophones should clearly read the handwriting on the wall. All reasonable Anglophone demands and aspirations will be fulfilled.

Back to the question with which we started. Normally, we are not told the person who proposes the question which “Tam-Tam Weekend” takes down the streets. But, this time

around, it was clearly announced that the question was proposed by the General Manager of the Corporation, the Professor with “original ideas,” Gervais Mendo Ze. As far back as March 1991, (See NO TRIFLING MATTER of March 27- April 4, 1991) the son of Gobata had suggested that this very unhandsome gentleman should be replaced with a more suitable Cameroonian. But the suggestion, as usual, fell on deaf ears.

A story is told of late President Ahidjo, how he once asked for names to be proposed to him in view of appointing a new ambassador. On the list proposed to Ahidjo was the name of a well qualified Cameroonian about 4 feet tall. Ahidjo cancelled the name with such vigour that the paper on which it was written tore. He had nothing against pygmies. His point was that if you sent a person like that as your country’s ambassador you would create the inevitable impression on the outside world that that is how the typical Cameroonian is. In Ahidjo’s view, that would have been unpardonable with 12 million other Cameroonians to choose from.. Television is a very glamorous medium. Telegenecity is the watchword. So why settle for someone with a face like an Oku mask when nearly 12 million other Cameroonians, equally qualified and with more handsome faces, are available? Florent Etoga, for instance, was also a crook (if you want to know how many billions he swindled, go and ask Garga Haman Adj) but, at least, his face wasn’t the type that a pregnant woman would be scared of looking at for fear of giving birth to a monster. And yet Etoga hadn’t the penchant for showing his face on the screen the way Mendo Ze does.

Back to our question. When early this year Professor Mendo Ze was all over the place teaching devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, I kept quiet because I couldn’t reconcile his blessed virginity obsession with the tales that pretty dames and damsels working at CRTV bring down

from his 11th floor office at Mballa II. But when he tells us that the Pope is the head of the Catholic Church in Cameroon, I can no longer contain my silence.

Note that the Professor would have been quite right if the last two words had not been part of his question. In other words, if he had simply asked “who is the head of the Catholic church?” his answer would have been quite correct. His Holiness the Pope is the head of the Universal Catholic (excuse the tautology) church. But it is absurd to say that the Pope is the head of the Catholic Church in Cameroon. If we follow such absurd reasoning we would have to say that the Pope is the parish priest of every catholic parish. But in that case we should have to say that the person who suggested “Jesus Christ” as the head of the Catholic Church in Cameroon came closest to the truth.. I say “came closest” because if we push that a little further we should have to say that, since Jesus Christ is only the second person of the blessed Trinity, the correct answer should be “God the Father” or, to be on the safest side, we should have to say that the Blessed Trinity is the head of the catholic church in Cameroon.

Prof. Mendo Ze’s reason for saying that the Pope is the head of the Catholic church in Cameroon is that the Cardinal is a bishop and every bishop is the *oga patapata* in his own diocese. Maybe the Prof. doesn’t know that the Pope is also a bishop with his own diocese. The Pope is the Bishop of Rome. And, in this regard, he is no more Bishop of Yaounde than Jean Zoa is Bishop of Rome. Every Bishop is the supreme administrative authority in his own diocese but, of course, he doesn’t think of himself as the “Head” of the diocese. Catholic theology and philosophy does not encourage that way of thinking. Rather, every Bishop thinks of himself as the *SERVUS SERVORUM DEI* (Servant of the Servants of God). This doesn’t, of course, mean that a Bishop is equal in status with an Archbishop or an Archbishop with a Cardinal. The Catholic Church is a very hierarchical structure.

Mendo's question presupposes that the definite description "Head of the Catholic Church in Cameroon" has an extra-mental referent or occupant, that is to say, that it is instantiated in the real world. The question thus begs the question: is there anything of that description? The description doesn't have to correspond to anything outside the mental and linguistic realms. In other words, there does not have to be a "Head of the Catholic Church in Cameroon." That is why I say that not only the answer but and especially the question is foolish.

Published September 15-22, 1993

L'heure est grave

A few days ago someone met me at my favourite drinking spot in Djoungolo and started haranguing me: "Son of Gobata, have you now started dealing with trifling matters? The last NO TRIFLING MATTER seemed to me like a very trifling matter. That thing about the head of the catholic church in Cameroon was just a play on words and you ended up not answering the question yourself. By the way, did Mendo Ze seize your girlfriend? You really finished him!"

Well, I advised him to go and read the piece again. Some people just browse through a piece of writing with one eye, the other on their half-empty bottle of beer, and jump to conclusions. NO TRIFLING MATTER never deals with trifling matters. Sometimes, however, it speaks as if in parable so that those who have ears to hear might hear or it leaves its stories open-ended so as to also give you the chance to complete it your own way, or it uses enthymemes or truncated arguments so that you yourself can draw the implied conclusions.

Mendo has never snatched my girlfriend. (Even the one I have at CRTV has so far resisted his lecherous advances - if you can believe a chick!). I did not "finish" him. I did not also simply play on words in addressing the question "Who is the head of the catholic church in Cameron?" I clearly answered the question even without answering it. Don't say "There he goes again!" Must everything always be spelt out like the *News in special English*? If you think that the question was a trifling matter then you probably don't know the following. The professor under spotlight belongs to a

mafia of kingmakers who once groomed a candidate for the Cardinalate, not knowing that Rome cannot be easily manipulated in such matters. If you want to know the other members of the mafia, flash your mind back to all those who were ostentatiously receiving Holy Communion from the hand of the Pope himself when he visited here in 1984.

Anyway, to cut a long story short, the candidate they had groomed and prepared and lobbied for failed when Rome appointed Christian Wiyghan Tumi from Kikaikelahki (K4) as the first ever Cameroonian Cardinal. They were so shocked that for several days CRTV said not a word about the momentous event. When silence became too loud and diplomatic telephones started asking questions they suddenly bent over backwards and made a great belated noise about the appointment and even sent a presidential plane to carry the appointee. But ever since, they have never missed an opportunity to belittle the Cardinal. Whenever they get the chance, they never fail to ask him if he is the boss of all the bishops, and gleefully broadcast his answer that every bishop is an uncontested *supremo* in his own diocese. But the logic of the common man on the street inevitably sees the Cardinal as the “Head” of the Catholic Church in Cameroon and considers the disagreement of any other bishop with him, even over profane matters, as treachery, if not treason. It was this common man’s logic that Mendo Ze’s question was out to combat. It was not an innocent question at all. And there is at least one bishop who frequently contradicts the Cardinal’s expressed opinion on profane matters.

Why did the mafia want a Cardinal of their own choice? The answer is simple. They already have profane power firmly within their iron grip. But they have always been worried that without a similar grip over spiritual power, their hold on profane power might not be as firm and permanent as they want. Of course, they don’t understand anything

about the nature of spiritual power, but that is another matter. All they think is that if they can monopolize all the “powers” – civil, spiritual, administrative, military, economic, etc., they would reign forever. When the Pope disappointed them, they had no choice but to fall back on Rosicrucianism where they reign with uncontested sway. Rosicrucianism is certainly a cult. Is it also a religion? Find that out for yourself.

Having thus defended myself against the false charges of my “brother in the bottle,” I have enough time left only to make a few preliminary remarks about what should really have been the focus of my attention this week, namely, the GCE debacle and the situation of our educational system in general. Our educational system, just like our governmental system, has completely collapsed, but, in both cases, we are boldly pretending that all is well and there is nothing the matter. More on this on another occasion.

Our Minister of National Education, His Excellency, (the honourable) Dr. Robert Mbella Mbappe, deserves a place in the Guinness Book of Records under several entries. He has really demonstrated beyond all reasonable doubt that, if blundering has no extrinsic maximum, then shamelessness also has no limits. First, he blundered, then (shamelessly) did the right thing and then blundered again! With regard to the marking of the GCE and the re-opening of schools, the scenario has been exactly identical. For four weeks running, the Minister has issued a decree each week directly contradicting the previous week’s decree.

Our French proprietors and manipulators are evidently thoroughly confused. But, by picking on the Anglophone educational system as the arena on which to test the limits of their logic of brute force, they exhibit some good sense. If they can succeed here, they have nothing to fear in any other arena. *L’heure est grave!* All Anglophones, including those who are both deaf and dumb in frog, must understand

Godfrey B. Tangwa (Rotcod Gobata)

this. The period when fence-sitting and equivocations were possible is over. All hands must go on deck. Our very survival is at stake.

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A Dictatorship Cannot Be Reformed

You cannot reform a dictatorship. You can only change it. And, so far, no peaceful method has yet been discovered, nor seems discoverable, by which to change a dictatorship. A dictatorship cannot be transformed into a democracy because the two are directly antithetical to each other. They are like darkness and light which cannot coexist. The belief that a dictatorship can peacefully be transformed into a democracy is naively illusive. You cannot use democratic logic, democratic methods and practices to change a dictatorship.

To dream of doing so is to dream of one day making an omelette without cracking eggs. It is to think that one day it might become possible to eat your cake and still preserve it.

The above conclusions have not been forced on me by a *priori* reasoning without the help of experience. It is reflection on experience that makes the above conclusions inevitable. Any careful observer of the contemporary African political scene would agree. In the past three years, several concomitant attempts have been made to peacefully transform African dictatorships into democracies. To no avail. Witness Zaire, Togo, Kenya.

Witness Cameroon. Democratic rhetoric became fashionable in Cameroon three years ago. But, this far along the road, where are we? Where do we stand vis-à-vis democracy?

I have said it before in this column that there is, as yet, no “democratization process” in Cameroon, in spite of the fact that everybody glibly talks about it. There is certainly a “democratic struggle” on, but it has not yet achieved any breakthrough. Am I a pessimist? No. I am a realist.

Let’s examine the balance-sheet together. We don’t need to range far. Let’s limit ourselves only to the last thirty days or so.

Three good years after the “democratization process” is supposed to have begun, we could record the following extremely anti-democratic events within a single month.

- 1) Mr. Garga Haman Adjii, a Cameroonian well respected all over the national territory and the leader of a registered political party, planned to give a press conference at Hilton Hotel. He duly applied for permission within the prescribed time limit. Permission was refused under the pretext that he did not submit in advance the text of what he was going to talk about and that public peace and security stood at risk. Garga Haman gently explained, as one would explain something to a thorough idiot, that in a press conference the “conferencier” only answers questions posed by various journalists and that, as for public order and security, he would personally assure them. The authorities not only turned a deaf ear but further went behind the scenes and blackmailed the management of Hilton Hotel to cancel the contract they had made with Garga for use of their hall. In the end, Garga had to hold his press conference in his house. The question is: Is that Dr. Paul Biya’s idea of democracy?

- 2) The British under-secretary at the Commonwealth Office, Mr. Goodenough, came visiting.. When he went to Bamenda he not only met with governmental

authorities but also met with eminent senior citizens and personalities such as John Ngu Foncha, Solomon Tandeng Muna, Archbishop Paul Verdzekov. He not only visited Ni John Fru Ndi but had supper with him at the “Presidency” in Ntarikon. But the CRTV, our public mass media, only reported that he met with Mr. Bell Luc René and showed pictures of Mr. Goodenough in the midst of military commanders as if he had gone to Bamenda to inspect military installations or something of the sort. Is that Dr. Biya’s idea of democracy?

- 3) No Cameroonian of goodwill can pretend not to know how 5 million Southern Cameroonians feel about the GCE crisis. It touches the very depths of our being and the future of our children. I can scarcely think of any other issue over which Southern Cameroonians, varied as we are, would be so unanimous as with the demand for a Cameroon Examinations Board (CEB), run by Southern Cameroonians, to take care of all Anglophone Examinations.

On this issue the traitors can be counted on the fingers of the hand. They are: one Simon, three Peters, Two Ephraims, one John and one Francis - making eight blacklegs in all among 5 million souls. Yet, Dr. Biya’s government, in a show of unbelievable brigandage and vandalism, carted GCE scripts, in the dead of night, from Buea and Bamenda to Yaounde, where they are busy recruiting unqualified Francophones to “mark” them. Is that Dr. Biya’s idea of democracy? The answer is blowing in the wind.

- 4) A few days ago, two perfectly legalized parties in the South West Province came together to form a coalition. The notorious governor of the said Province,

Oben Peter Ashu (or is it Peter Oben Ashu?) sent soldiers to throw hand grenades and tears gas in the private home where they were having their meeting. Of course, we all knew that the next day we would see the “Chiefs of the South West Province” at Unity Palace and hear their leader, Nfon Mukete of Kumba, reiterating for the umpteenth time, that they don’t want a two-state federation “along colonial linguistic lines” but a ten state federation (along what lines?). If they don’t want a two state federation, why do they want a ten state federation? Why do they want a federation at all? These jokers have really carried their sycophancy far too far. When the ongoing radicalization of the South West attains North West levels, we will see which “South West Chief” will again carry his flat feet to Unity Palace. Enough is enough! *Haba!!*

Published September 29- October 6, 1993

A Tale of Anniversaries

I am scripting this on October 1st 1993. That is my own way of celebrating. So, HAPPY 32nd ANNIVERSARY TO ALL SOUTHERN CAMEROONIANS! Southern Cameroons gained its independence on October 1st 1961. On that day, at exactly zero hour, the British “Union Jack,” representing the authority of Her Britannic Majesty, the Queen, Monarch of the vast British Empire, was lowered all over the territory of Southern Cameroons. As the “Union Jack” was coming down, the green-red-yellow flag of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, with two vertical stars, representing two independent states, was hoisted in its place, because Southern Cameroonians had, in a plebiscite organized by the United Nations on February 11th 1961, overwhelmingly opted for UNIFICATION with La République du Cameroun, which had gained its independence from France on 1st February 1960. All this is solid history. Elementary Cameroon history. Any Cameroonian who doesn’t know the above historical facts should boil his/her yamhead in hot shame.

So, the alarm raised by the wrapper-tying, broom-waving chiefs of the South West Province, (this time without the famous elites) and re-echoed by “*des forces vives*” of the North West Province is really shockingly alarming in its puerility. Through the eyes of the CRTV cameras, we saw these two successive groups of state clowns telling Dr. Biya in Unity Palace that the people of Southern Cameroons were preparing to declare their independence on October 1st 1993. How can an independent state declare again its independence? What the Cameroon Anglophone Movement

(CAM) and the All Anglophones Conference (AAC) decided was that Southern Cameroonians should start commemorating and celebrating their long-neglected independence day. This decision enjoys the overwhelming support of all Southern Cameroonians, and today will be accordingly commemorated and celebrated in spite of the *de facto* declaration of a state of emergency by the Biya regime in Southern Cameroons.

The only Southern Cameroonians who may not be celebrating with us today are the Nfons (the initial 'N' is very important) of the South West and the forty-one "forces vives" of the North West, led by Chief Angwafor III, National Vice-President of Dr. Paul Biya's CPDM party. If there were any more they would surely also have been shown at the Unity Palace to create the desired impression that many Southern Cameroonians are against Southern Cameroons.

Not everyone you see in a track-suit is necessarily an athlete. Not everyone who wears a Bamenda-gown is a Fon. This is what many Francophones especially do not realize. Some Francophones seem to have been very impressed with the "*forces vives*" delegation from the North West, under the erroneous impression that all those they saw in Bamenda-gowns are Fons. Many people don't know that every self-respecting graffi man has a Bamenda-gown in his wardrobe which he can bring out at a moment's notice for any ceremony, serious or clownish. Cameroonians abroad generally also take a lot of pride in wearing the Bamenda dress because it always attracts a great deal of admiring attention in its uniqueness. Recall the stir that the Fon of Babungo caused in his magnificent Bamenda robes in Lagos during FESTAC in 1977. There was no Fon, properly so-called, among the delegation from the North West that we saw at Unity Palace recently. Angwafor III who led the delegation could pass for a Fon but, strictly speaking, within

the North West traditional context, he is no more than a chief. He is the chief of a single cosmopolitan town, Mankon, whose “*authochthones*” like those of most other cosmopolitan cities, have been submerged to a point of extinction, by the “*allogenes*.”

The paramount Fondoms of the North West are well-known from pre-colonial times. They are four in number: Bali, Bafut, Kom and Nso. No further comment, except to ask if the likes of the Tata Nformi John, J.C. Kangkolo, Felicitas Wongibe, S.K Nyoh, S.W. Tamfu, Atanga Nji Paul and the Royal Spear of Kom (whatever or whoever that is) are what the North West Province could send out anywhere as its “*forces vives*”? The answer is clearly blowing in the wind! We have witnessed this whole scenario before, prior to the 11th October 1992 presidential elections. Dr. Paul Biya’s capacity for self-deception really seems to have no limits. Once again we saw him waving his arms, like an air hostess showing the corridors and emergency exits before take-off, and promising to visit the North West sometime soon. What will he be going to do there? Is it to see for himself how much havoc the state of emergency caused? To inaugurate the famous Bamenda-Fundong road before construction even begins? To find out if any traces of Anglo-Saxon culture are still surviving? To at last seek audience at the Ntarikon Palace? Or simply to mount a dais and shamelessly repeat his well-known catalogue of false promises? Choose your own answer.

What stops citizens of *La République du Cameroun* from commemorating and celebrating their independence on 1st February? We can then jointly celebrate our coming together as one nation through UNIFICATION. Is the reason why they don’t celebrate not perhaps because they very well know that on February 1st 1960 they did not gain any independence, since French people have continued to control their lives in all minutest details?

By the 11th of October we would also start commemorating a gigantic fraud whose cumulative result was to re-saddle us with Dr. Paul Biya. Stealing a victory and thereby subverting the popular will is one thing. Managing such stolen victory successfully is quite another. If Dr. Biya hangs on to illegitimate power and continues with his highly pretentious and repressive practices, it can be confidently predicted (again) that Southern Cameroons would become a sovereign state before the year 2000. Let the French know this and tremble!

Published October 6-13, 1993

Moral Bankruptcy

The main source of all the problems facing Cameroon today is not the economic crisis or tribalism or even dictatorship *per se*. The intolerable dictatorship under which we are suffering, the economic crisis crushing us and the tribalism threatening to tear us apart are simply effects, symptoms, corollaries or signs of something more deep-seated and generic. The main source of all our problems is moral bankruptcy. Please, don't stop reading. I am not about to start impersonating a religious preacher. The son of Gobata is a full-fledged layman. When I talk of morality, I mean ordinary, profane morality whose only prerequisites are rationality, freedom and the gregarious nature of human beings. I am talking about the type of morality that even a convinced atheist would accept and cannot help accepting.

One of the ways accurately to gauge moral sensibility is to weigh altruistic determinants of behaviour against egoistic ones. A human being is moral in his/her behaviour to the extent that his/her actions and behaviour in general are determined by considerations of others' interest as against personal interest. A world in which there is no morality, in which every individual puts his/her personal interest before everyone else's and before any other thing, would be a Hobbesian-Machiavellian world, characterized by a *bellum omium contra omnes* (war of each against all). In such a world, everyone would be for himself and there would be no room for God; so no question of God being for all. Life in such a world would be "nasty, brutish and short" as Thomas Hobbes very clearly realized. Today in Cameroon, we are not very far from such a world.

Democracy, which is the polar opposite of autocratic dictatorship, can admit local flavourings, colourings and tintings. Our democracy need not have the same colour, tinting or flavour as American or British democracy. These external elements of democracy are context-bound. But there is no conceivable context in which a democracy would be a dictatorship. There is no conceivable context in which it would be right to declare the loser in a democratic election as the winner. Contextual peculiarity and local colouring could never be pleaded in such a case.

This week marks the first anniversary of one of the clearest indicators of our moral bankruptcy as a (putative) nation when we all stood idly by and witnessed a gigantic moral fraud as the clear loser of an election was declared the winner, before our very eyes, with trumpets and bugles and drums. What excuse can possibly exonerate us within these circumstances? During the assassination of Stephen, the first martyr, there was a young man who did not participate in the murder but who stood idly by taking care of the cloaks of the scoundrels who were carrying out the murder. He was equally guilty of murder of an innocent person.

Today, we are all groaning under the weight of taxes. Every passing day novel taxes are introduced in a manner that shows complete lack of a sense of timing, proportion and decency. If you are very naïve, you would surely think that all these taxes are a way by which the government is trying to cope with the so-called economic crisis. Far from it. Even the most slow-witted of economists can see that some of the recent taxes, such as the numerous toll gates on the roads, will help to worsen the economic crisis. The nasty truth is that the band of ... (a nine-letter word which you know very well) presiding over our lives against our will and better judgment are dreaming up these taxes for completely different reasons. The secret behind the taxes is

their need for ready liquid cash; be it for constructing palaces and golf courses, bribing the bribe-able or hiring assassins. Before, they could just walk into any bank and take out the money. But, with the intervention of the international money lenders, that is no longer possible. Hence the idea of introducing these obnoxious taxes. What happens to the money collected will forever remain a big mystery. This is a confident statement.

Have you read the “humble and earnest appeal” of the Bishops of the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province to the “Right Honourable Simon Achidi Achu, MP, Prime Minister”? Please, don’t depend on the garbled summaries that appeared in the newspapers. Read the complete document! If you don’t yet have it, ask the first Southern Cameroonian you meet after reading this and photocopy it for yourself. It is a powerful historic document. Its altruistic nature is as clear as day. On the GCE saga, we need say no more. Our Bishops have said it all.

When I read through this document and imaginatively put myself in the place of the addressee, I saw him tearfully undergoing a radical transformation and risking all to do the right thing by standing firmly, though belatedly, by his long oppressed and suppressed people. But alas! Nothing of the sort has happened. The “Right Honourable” has instead decided that “*l'autorité de l'Etat*,” with which he has always been obsessed, must be maintained at all cost. He has, therefore, allegedly ordered his accomplices to go into the highways and byways and recruit GCE markers. Any Francophone who can say something in English has the prospect of a lucrative job at the GCE marking centres in Yaounde.

L'impossible n'est pas Camerounais!

We can only stand by and watch in total dumbfoundedness. No combination of explanatory factors can really satisfactorily explain this. Agreed that none of Mbella Mbappe's children study in Cameroon; that Achidi Achu has started sending his own children to study abroad; that Christine Andela and her Minister share 20 million each year for "organizing the marking" of the GCE; are these really enough explanation for the GCE scandal? Your own judgment might be better than mine.

Published October 13-20, 1993

Irreparable Rupture

You cannot savagely crush a tender flower and then repair it again. No matter how hard you may try. It could never be the same again. You cannot rape an innocent child, then regret it and restore its innocence again. A love relationship may once have been magic, paradisaically sweet. Then one day, one of the lovers discovers a great deception and betrayal on the part of other. The hitherto wonderful relationship breaks down, causing untold emotional damage. Can it ever be repaired again? Can things ever be the same again?

These are the thoughts that raced through my mind as I watched His Excellency Dr. Paul Biya, pretending to be watching the Indomitable Lions in their World Cup qualifying match against the Warriors of Zimbabwe last Sunday, October 10th. He had evidently gone there to see what political capital he could reap from the occasion. Most of the time you could see that his mind was far away, preoccupied with weightier matters, perhaps. But whenever he was aware that the TV camera was on him, he would then do something such as laughing exaggeratedly and meaninglessly and unconvincingly, or pretending to be saying something to the “*megida*” to his right, who all the time was jogging with his bump on his seat like an excited little kid, in a way that only a “*megida*” could manage. Is it easy to hunt for grasshoppers while carrying the carcass of an elephant on the head?

“*L’homme Lion*” went to the Ahmadou Ahidjo stadium with a decree in his pocket, declaring the next day, Monday 11th October, a public holiday. Even if the Lions had lost the match, he would still have signed the decree. And you

know why. But notice that, three years after we are supposed to have set out on the path of democracy and political accountability, one single individual can still wake up from his mid-day slumber and simply say. “JE DECRETE...” and that is that. Does he think that all other Cameroonians can afford to squander their days in total idleness the way he does? Does he think it is everybody who has billions in foreign banks? And then the insult of pompously declaring that he had personally paid 10.000 FCFA for his ticket into the stadium! Oh yeah? When did all that begin?

Biya Bi Mvondo once charmed Cameroonians. Once upon a time he was everybody’s darling. No more. The magic is gone. The calabash is broken. The rupture is complete. He was booed as he left the stadium. What “*marabout*” can help him reverse the arrow of history?

The rupture between Southern Cameroons and La République du Cameroun is equally complete. The marriage is on the rocks. The union has broken down. Irretrievably. Irreparably. The spouses may continue to live under the same roof but it will be in separate rooms. The magic is gone. The dream has ended because a dream only lasts while you are asleep. It’s all over. In fact, it ended long ago but we did not realize it because we were asleep and dreaming.

It has taken the GCE saga to rouse us from three decades of slumber. But now we are awake and dreaming no more. When this GCE thing reached its high water point, its moment of truth, some three weeks ago, I stated in this column that our local marionettes and their French manipulators had carefully picked on the Anglophone educational system to test their logic of sheer brute force because they very well knew that if they succeed here they would succeed in any other domain. Was I wrong? In the past few weeks, the GCE saga has brought out the ruling junta into the open day light in its stark nudity. Who again is still in doubt that this country is under the grip of a handful

of terrorists who run its affairs? Cameroon is the only country on earth where the signature of the Prime Minister and Head of Government could be fraudulently secured for a false document and the document widely diffused over the mass media and nothing happens. Anywhere else heads would have rolled immediately.

The above executive fraud was committed a few days ago (Tuesday 12/10/93) on the occasion when Anglophone parents in Yaounde turned out *en masse* to peacefully demonstrate at Mbella Mbappes' Ministry of National Education over the GCE scandal. Mbella hid in his office, panicked and telephoned the troops. The troops arrived and without asking any questions or issuing any threats, simply bombarded the parents with toxic water-canon and tear gas. Haba! Do you engage someone in a fight without the slightest quarrel? One of the parents immediately lost an eye while others escaped with minor injuries. Similar horror stories are reported from Bamenda. That is Cameroon in 1993 under the iron rule of Dr. Paul Biya, alias "*L'homme Courage.*"

But these tribulations have had one salutary long-term effect. They have finally convinced all Southern Cameroonians that the marriage contracted with La République du Cameroun on October 1st 1961, was a monumental error and that the irreparably-broken down marriage can only be salvaged in the form of a con-federal arrangement. Failing which a clear-cut divorce would be inevitable. Haba! Marriage na by force?

As I am writing this, CAM, AAC, TAC, SWELA, NOCUDA and the Confederation of Anglophone Parents are meeting to coordinate and harmonize strategies. Our traitors would soon be totally isolated. When we next see them at Unity Palace, they would be crying like abandoned babies. We're on the march.

Published October 20-27, 1993

The French May Not Be Foolish But...

The French may not be foolish, but they are certainly not wise. I am less concerned here with trying to prove the foolishness of the French than with demonstrating their lack of wisdom. Whether lack of wisdom and foolishness are simply two names for one and the same reality, two sides of one and the same coin, is not for me to say. You can decide that for yourself.

If the French were wise they would have realized the importance of the Freudian factor in Cameroon politics. Theoretically, the rise of John Fru Ndi is extremely important to the French and French neo-colonial politics in Cameroon. If the French were wise, they would have immediately realized how lucky they were at the emergence of Fru Ndi at a very crucial point in the political history of Cameroon. In terms of grass-root support all over the national territory, the “bookseller of Bamenda,” Ni John Fru Ndi, has no peer on our political firmament. I have made this statement before in this column because this has been the case since the historic launching of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in May 1990. In fact, the fanaticism with which Cameroonians, right across the board and across regional linguistic barriers, support Fru Ndi, is only matched by the latter’s own charisma..

The democratic wind of change which heralded the last decade of our millennium will not stop blowing until all repressive dictatorial systems are blown off from all parts

of the globe. The French should know. In a plural society as culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse as Cameroon, it is extremely difficult for any individual or even political party to draw the sort of support that Fru Ndi has enjoyed for three years running now. And this in spite of a formidable state machinery mobilized on all fronts against him. The latest opinion polls still give Fru Ndi about 80% of the support of Cameroonians and his nearest rival about 50%. And it is very significant that all the closest rivals are also his supporters such as Garga Haman Adjii, Hameni Bielieu and Sanda Oumarou; which means that as a team they enjoy close to 100% support of Cameroonians who are sick of the Biya junta and dying for change in Cameroon.

If the French were wise they would have realized the critical importance of the fact John Fru Ndi is an Anglophone. The Anglophone factor is the greatest challenge to French hegemony in Cameroon. The way things are at present, the French will surely meet their Waterloo in Cameroon within the context of the Anglophone problem. One possible scenario is the outright secession of the Anglophone region. As exploiters, this is a nightmarish possibility for the French since the mammary glands of the Cameroonian cow to be milked are located within that region. If the French had allowed Fru Ndi to have his victory in 1992, it is more than likely that the Anglophone problem would simply have fizzled out. Because what has greatly accentuated the Anglophone problem is blatant injustice, ably supported by ruthless repression and careless arrogance. The Fru Ndi phenomenon has helped to bring out the French assimilationist policy of the Anglophones in its stark nudity. And now the Anglophone problem has reached such a pitch that, even if Fru Ndi were to come to power now, Anglophones would not be satisfied with anything less than a return to federation. And it would have to be an enhanced federation with more autonomy than what existed prior to Ahmadou Ahidjo's 1972 fraud.

If the French were wise, they would surely have known that what makes the Anglo-Saxon world tick is not any so-called Anglo-Saxon cultural imperialism but rather LIBERALISM characterized by democracy, openness, tolerance and meritocracy. Last year, the *Francophonie Club* here in Yaounde held their activities at the *British Council*. An Anglophone activity can never be allowed at the *French Cultural Centre*. I've tried on several occasions and always been bluntly told that the FCC is not here to promote English. The French language is more sonorous, sweeter in the mouth and ear, than English. But everyone would eventually prefer English which is non-musical to the ear and often awkward in the mouth, simply because the "owners" of the English language are more tolerant of the mistakes of foreigners in English. In this way, many varieties of mutually comprehensible English, in full communion with their Britannic mother, have sprouted all over the globe. It is not by accident that the most important subject in all pre-secondary Francophone educational systems is "*Dictée*" which is replaced by "*Explication de texte*" at the post secondary level. The chief attributes of French culture are eating, drinking, shitting and fashion (*Haute couture*).

The scientific and technological success of the Anglo-Saxon world is directly related to its liberalism. It is this success that stands as a bulwark against which French Quixotic Anglophobia would be crashing, head first, with disastrous consequences. It is the same success that is forcing even the greatest Francophiles to learn English in spite of hating it. Go to the Pilot Centre, the British Council, the American Cultural Centre, and see for yourself the rate at which Francophones here in Cameroon are rushing to learn English. Find out how many Francophones are opting to send their children but to Anglophone schools.

Dr. Paul Biya ran away from the Francophonie summit in Mauritius two days before it ended. The reason is that, true to his Francophone upbringing, he can stand neither defeat nor debate nor open competition. So he walked out of the Francophonie classroom while the teacher he prides himself in being the best pupil of, was still teaching! What a rude and uncouth pupil!!!

Published October 27- November 3, 1993

The Sign of Things to Come

This week we can pause to celebrate some victories. What victories? Well, you may justifiably not consider that we have won any victories yet worth celebrating. But I would differ with you there and maintain that we have recently gained certain footholds, which as signs of things to come, are very significant and worth celebrating. I am thinking here of the GCE and the Commonwealth.

Cameroon's CONDITIONAL admission into the Commonwealth of Nations is worth celebrating. It is very important that the admission is conditional. We have never doubted the importance of belonging to the Commonwealth. Our problem has been that we knew all along that the New Deal regime of former Mr., later Dr. and now Professor (*honoris causa, Beijing*) Paul Biya, was only using admission into the Commonwealth as a gimmick to better help it in the suppression and assimilation of Anglophones, better known as Southern Cameroonians. There is no strategy so effective as taking control of the weapons an enemy could possibly use against you. Is that not what has happened to democracy in this country? Fearing the democratic hurricane as it approached, the regime gave up its stiff resistance and took control of the process so as to direct it away from its natural goal. See where we are today. Had the regime put up an honest fight, it would have long been routed and we should already have been enjoying and celebrating democracy in this country.

The CAM lobby must have worked very well at Nicosia, Cyprus. Cameroon is welcome to join the Commonwealth in two years' time as its 51st member, PROVIDED it

measures up to the *Harrare Declaration* which emphasizes democracy, human and minority rights. This means that we will have federation before then. And then, the federated state of Southern Cameroons will be in the Commonwealth exactly what La République du Cameroun is presently in the Francophonie. To an Anglophone Cameroonian, the Francophonie means absolutely nothing. But it is meaningful and important to Francophones. In like manner, the Commonwealth cannot mean anything to a Francophone Cameroonian, but it means everything to an Anglophone.

The second victory we must pause to celebrate is the installation of the Chairman of the GCE Board, Mr S.N. Dioh, at Buea which, incidentally, occurred on the same day as our conditional admission into the Commonwealth, namely, Monday 25th October, 1993. Did you listen to “Luncheon Date” on that day? If you did you must have heard Auntie (or is it anti?) Becky Ndivé, who excitedly anticipated the news and announced the installation with the same breathless alacrity and glee with which she has usually read the outrageously autocratic and repressive communiqués of the psychopathic Governor. What Becky did was illegal, since “Luncheon Date” is now strictly only for announcements, but we loved it. As one of the law-makers, she should know how to bend or break the law when it becomes necessary. So, is it not quite clear after all that all of us stand to gain from a credible educational system? Will Peter Agbor Tabi’s children and Peter Oben Ashu’s children not benefit from our struggles before my own children, the oldest of whom is still only three? Our next struggle will be for a credibly autonomous English language channel of CRTV. I hope that auntie Becky Ndivé and even the likes of *Fai Wo Tabshitiy* and Judas Lukariot (with a wink to the Herald’s Musings) will be with us the day we decide to march through Mballa II to Unity Palace to press home this particular demand. They will be the immediate beneficiaries of that demand.

But in spite of the installation of the Chairman of the GCE Board, and TAC's willingness to immediately start marking the GCE, Dr. Robert Mbella Mbappe and his collaborators has persisted in a logic of senseless defiance and intransigence that is very surprising for an octogenarian of his standing. Is a grey moustache not at least a sign of some practical wisdom garnered from experience through the years? The answer is blowing in the wind. Mbella Mbappe's people are refusing genuine GCE markers access into the marking centres. The Francophone adventurers he recruited before have continued damaging the GCE scripts. And his henchmen are even saying that they no longer need the real markers. That is the situation as I am writing this. Developments are being followed, minute by minute. I only hope that they are fully aware that the Anglophone Community has firmly resolved to reject this year's GCE results in *toto* and to reregister their children for a repeat of the exams UNLESS the marking is completely redone by the qualified markers.

We are anxiously awaiting the return of the Professor from China. If he has really earned his Professorship, oriental wisdom will surely lead him to remove, with immediate effect, on arrival, the following jiggers from our national foot: Mbella Mbappe, Peter Agbor Tabi, Joseph Owona and Ephraim Inoni. If he can, for once, do this and satisfy popular aspirations, I'm sure that he could soon bag another honorary qualification. The first meeting of the GCE Board could consider awarding him GCE A/Levels (*honoris causa*) in any two subjects of his choice.

Credible rumours reaching us hold that plans are underway to dedicate and name the University Library of Yaounde I after Professor Biya instead of Professor Fonlon as demanded by popular opinion. I have once praised Biya in this column for not caring about monuments being dedicated to him (See NO TRIFLING MATTER of April 30-May 6,

1992). May be he has changed. My own humble suggestion was given *loc cit.* Well, if they go ahead and name the library after him, then let us all patiently wait for time to tell which dedication will stand the test and which will be washed away, like fresh paint, by the first rains.

Published November 3-10, 1993

Eleven Years of Rapacious Plunder

There is a time for everything. A time for living and a time for dying. A time for planting and a time for harvesting. A time for talking and a time for keeping quiet. A time for joking and a time being serious. A time for buying and a time for selling. A time for writing and a time for reading. A time for working and a time for resting. A time for praising and a time for blaming. A time for blessing and a time for cursing. A time for laughter and a time for crying. A time for gathering stones and a time for throwing them. A time for building and a time for knocking down. A time for loving and a time for hating. A time for war and a time for peace.

There is a time for everything. A time for speaking in parables, metaphors and similes, and a time for speaking in simple, plain language. In this column, I have sometimes spoken in parables and metaphors and similes. There have been times for all these and more. But today, it is time to speak in simple, plain language. This week, Professor Paul Biya is having a dual celebration: first anniversary of his perjurious oath of office on 3rd November 1992 and eleventh anniversary of the dictatorship handed over to him on a platter of gold on 6th November 1982. What descriptive title can accurately capture the 11 years of the Biya pontificate? There are many possibilities and you surely have your own opinion. Many have equally occurred to me. I have turned them over in my mind, like oranges in a cane

basket, several times. But I am convinced that this one should take the cake and eat the gizzard: Biya's eleven years as our number one citizen have been ELEVEN YEARS OF INDESCRIBABLE RAPACIOUS PILLAGE AND PLUNDER. Quote me!

This is no time for flattery. This is no time for cosmetic decoration. This is no time for adornment. This is no time for laudatory psalms and canticles. This is time for simple, plain language. This is time to look truth straight in the eye, without squinting, without blinking. Eleven years ago, Mr. Biya, a humble and soft-spoken average Cameroonian, inherited an economically highly prosperous and promising nation, at peace with itself and with others, enjoying at least the optical illusion of unity in diversity. Eleven years down the road, that same nation has hit economic rock bottom, lives in constant strife and is in real danger of total disintegration.

This is no time for empty rhetoric. Let us look at the balance sheet calmly and frankly. By 1982, Cameroon was the envy of all other African countries south of the Sahara and north of the Limpopo. Today, Cameroon is a country on its knees in all spheres, in spite of its enormous human and material resources. Suppose that eleven years ago someone had told University Lectures, for example, that one day they would go without salaries for 5 consecutive months! Would they not have laughed to scorn? What is the reality today? Before 1982, Biya Bi Mvondo, an ex-seminarian, was an administrative technocrat with a discreet style of life and no landed property anywhere. Eleven years down the road, he has a marble palace, an 18-hole planetary golf course, a standard airport and fruit plantations in his natal village, Mvomeka'a. It took bloody riots here in Yaounde before he relinquished a choice piece of land, site of a mosque and cultural centre, he had simply coveted from the Muslims. In 1982, he had no holding in foreign

lands. He had no hospital in Baden Baden, Germany, no wine press in France, no real estate property in Beverly Hills or Geneva, no coded accounts in Switzerland or the Bahamas, no securities in bullion or diamonds. How much are his brothers in dictatorship of the sub-region holding safe for him in their own strongholds? Your guess is as good as mine.

Today, the country is run at all levels, and in all sectors by certified mediocres, mostly of the Beti tribe. Mere kids are shamelessly put in command over their own trainers, mentors, teachers, instructors, professional superiors and betters. By 1982, Biya Bi Mvondo had no honorific title. Eleven years down the road, he has gathered all imaginable and unimaginable honorific titles: Fon of Fons (honoris causa, Bamenda), Doctor of Agriculture (honoris causa, Maryland, Eastern Shores), Chinese citizen (honoris causa), Professor (discipline unspecified, honoris causa, Beijing). He seems to be as addicted to unearned honours as he is to his famous CHIVAS Whiskey. That is why I still stand by my previous suggestion that, if he pities Cameroonians and removes at least the four jiggers I called by name last week, the GCE. Board should seriously consider awarding him honorary GCE Advanced Levels in two subjects. That is the honour that is still lacking from his pyramid of honours. And yet, that should be the foundation of any such pyramid, if it is to be a solid structure. Or am I slipping into parables again?

My brother, friend and next-door neighbour, *The Postman*, is always referring to the Fon of Fons as “Fun of Fons.” At first I never used to get his meaning. But, if you look at it carefully, the most appropriate appellation should really be “Fun of funs” which, as you may realize, is exactly co-terminus with and equivalent to “Fon of funs.” So, whichever of the formulas you prefer, you are perfectly right. My guess is that the professorship awarded by the Chinese is in this

very discipline of Fun, because I know of honorary doctorates but have never before heard of an honorary professorship.

Whatever the case, let the professor of Funs stop talking about democracy. You cannot talk of democracy where people cannot freely express themselves, associate or peacefully march without risk of death. No one should talk of democracy in this country where they tell us about reconciliation and dialogue with Fru Ndi in the evening while planning to assassinate him the next morning. Eleven years ago, Biya's predecessor-in-dictatorship stunned the nation by resigning. Why can Biya not also stun the nation now? If he did, we could even forgive and forget the rapacious plunder of the past eleven years.

Published November 10-17, 1993

Lessons From The GCE Affair

The French and their local marionettes and errand boys have put Anglophone Power to the test and seen for themselves what they are up against. As I remarked before, they showed a lot of wisdom in picking on the Anglophone educational system as the arena on which to test the success of their three-decades old policy of assimilation. Had they succeeded here, they would have known that they could over-run all the other areas without even token resistance. But we stood up like one man against them and they learned that “*small no be sick*.” We hope that their self-imposed delusions and illusions about having conquered and assimilated us have now disappeared. Silence is not consent and love of peace is not cowardice. We have begun. We will demand justice and fair-play everywhere. We will demand admission of past wrongs and injustices and exact reparation, restitution and compensation. Freely and voluntarily we opted for this Union. Freely and voluntarily we shall remain in it or freely and voluntarily opt out of it again.

If they have profited from the GCE experience, we expect the French to change their tactics and *modus operandi*. The Fru Ndi affair shows that they could do this. They are the ones who have always told their pupil, Professor of Nothing, Paul Biya, that Cameroon is too small to contain both him and Fru Ndi and that they, his French Masters, want him to stay on. Even a dull pupil with an IQ close to zero could have drawn the right consequence from this, namely that Fru Ndi must go by all means. Since 1990, I have personally recorded seven direct attempts on Fru Ndi’s

life. The man must have more than the seven lives of the proverbial cat. The French were heavily implicated in the latest assassination attempt on Fru Ndi on 3rd November, 1993. When it failed, like all the previous ones, they quickly changed their tactics and posed as mediators. It is very significant that Pa Foch himself could go over national television and shamelessly declare that they were ordered by the French Ambassador to return Philip Che's hunting rifle and his son's toy pistol as demanded by Chairman Fru Ndi, and that they were assured by the same Ambassador that the things were quite harmless. Just watch. The French will soon propose themselves as the "neutral witness" that Fru Ndi has always demanded as a condition for any dialogue with Biya.

Back to our GCE. We won the GCE battle because we sank all illusive differences and stood up like one man against a common threat. Who again remembered the so-called Northwest/Southwest divide or Protestant/Catholic rivalry when we were engaged in the fight? The traitors amongst us stood out like sore fingers but they did not belong to one side of any putative divide. When the Chairman of the GCE Board was finally named, in the person of Mr. S.N. Dioh, I listened carefully but I never heard anybody complain: "These graffi people have come again with their grab-all mentality" or "These Southwesterners have again emerged from the wings to collect plums they never fought for and reap where they did not sow." Instead, I heard witness after witness testifying to Mr. Dioh's human qualities- his natural and acquired endowments, hard work, moral integrity. I don't know Mr. Dioh personally and, up to this very moment, I still don't know which corner of Southern Cameroons he comes from, nor do I care, but I was satisfied when someone I trust, who knows him very well, described him as "firm, free and fair."

All this proves that a meritocratic system is liable to satisfy everybody. In fact, only a meritocratic system is capable of satisfying everybody, as the son of Gobata has tried, *per longum et latum*, to prove in this column. (Please, refer to NO 'TRIFLING MATTER' of the following successive weeks: December 12-19, 1991, January 6-13, 1992, January 15-22, 1992). A meritocratic system is, moreover, inevitable in a democratic setting. The reason we value the GCE so much is that it is a meritocratic system of academic evaluation which, like justice, is completely blind to biodata. Let some of those helping to destroy the GCE today remember that, as children of poor peasants, they would never have made it in life under a less fair system than the GCE.

The son of Gobata will continue preaching this doctrine of meritocracy until everybody is fed up to choking with it. Where anybody comes from, has got nothing to do with it. The recent GCE battle revealed something rather dramatic in this regard. It is a tale of two Agbor-Tabis. Here are two brothers from the very same womb, one called John and the other Peter. They both played leading roles in the GCE imbroglio, on opposite sides of the battle line. One was ready to lay down his life for the future of our children, the other was ready to mortgage that same future for a few million francs. I tell you that the same womb can bring forth light and darkness, angel and devil, the Messiah as well as the Judas who would sell him for less than thirty pieces of any metal. I had once drawn the contrasts between John Niba Ngu and Victor Anomah Ngu. That was before I came to know Chief John Agbor-Tabi and Dr. Peter Agbor-Tabi. I will surely return to this issue in future.

If you are a Northwesterner, ask yourself whether you stand to gain more from Ekontang Elad and Simon Munzu or from Francis Nkwain and Honourable Tamfu. If you are a Southwesterner, ask yourself whether it is John Fru Ndi

Godfrey B. Tangwa (Rotcod Gobata)

who is fighting for your interests and well-being or the likes of Nfon Mukete, “Paramount Chief” Endeley or Oben Peter Ashu. We shall talk again when I hear your answer.

Published November 17-24, 1993

Further Lessons

If you didn't succeed in getting your copy of the CAMPOST last week, you may be wondering what "further lessons" I am talking about. Last week I was drawing some lessons from the GCE affair. Am I even sure this which I am writing now will reach you?

Censorship is back in full force and the *Cameroon Post* is being seized from the vendors and newsstands almost regularly. For a while we thought we had put that era firmly behind us. But here we are again right back to square one. As with nearly every other thing about which we've had the illusion of having made some progress, we've simply been jogging on the same spot.

We cannot close the first chapter of our GCE struggle without remarking about the level of sacrifice and endurance that people are usually willing to undergo for a cause they believe in. Do you know that some GCE markers were walking several kilometres (yes, on foot!) every day to and from the marking centres and also nearly starving? But that did not deter them from their determination to mark. Before the GCE markers reached here, Dr. Robert Mbella Mbappe and his small clique of frauds masquerading as public officials had already shared and squandered 290 million francs out of the 300 million allocated from public coffers for the marking of the GCE. So by the time the over 2000 real markers got here only 10 million francs was left in the GCE budget. Did we not suspect before that the bottom line beyond all the manoeuvres and gymnastics was a matter of cool raw cash?

So, with only 10 million francs now left as the GCE budget, they proposed to pay each marker a flat rate of 10.000 francs for the entire marking exercise, as against the 25.000 per week plus free snacks they had been paying the fake markers. They thought that there were only two possible ways in which the GCE markers could react to this insult: accept the pittance in their desperation or reject it and riot. Their anti-riot zombies were even put on full alert that day. Had the markers fallen for the bait and in their destitution, taken the 10.000 francs that would have greatly assuaged their consciences and relieved them of the duty ever to explain what they did with 290 million francs before the GCE markers arrived. Had the markers, on the other hand, rioted, they would have brutalized them in typical fashion, dispersed them, and then proceeded to publish the fake results they had been preparing to publish before the arrival of the real markers. But the markers took a third opinion which they hadn't foreseen: they firmly rejected the 10.000 francs insult but did not riot and calmly continued with the marking in their penury.

All Cameroonians of good will, and all Southern Cameroonians of both good and bad will, owe the GCE markers a standing ovation for their demonstrable patriotism. The New Deal regime of Professor Paul Biya is indeed politically very short-sighted. Here is a regime that is full of professors. It's supposed leader is even a professor himself. Check around the world. If you find any other regime, anywhere on earth, with half as many professors in its governmental ranks as the Biya regime, you should report to the son of Gobata. This regime of professors deserves multiple entries in the *Guinness Book of Records* for multiple reasons. One of them is that its professors are no match for primary and secondary school teachers. As those in contact with the grassroots, it is a wonderful thing that the GCE markers have come to Yaounde and seen and experienced

for themselves what we are all up against. They will carry the message to all nooks and corners of Southern Cameroons. The next battle could be a walk-over.

The son of Gobata is particularly gratified with the way the GCE struggle has gone. For the first time in the past three years, this was the only occasion that NO TRIFLING MATTER called for all hands on deck at approaching danger and nearly all hands really went on deck. In the last three years, I have spoken all the grammar I ever learned in Sasse in this column. To what effect? I have tried advising a completely deaf government. I have screamed to the point of losing the voice to awaken a sleeping public that the house is on fire. To no avail. Well, I intend to stop talking soon. From then on I will only be acting in dumb show without saying a word. What is left to be said that I have not already said? The other day I wrote, pointing out that there are limits to which a tribal clique could use sheer force and hope to successfully continue lording it over 12 million people as varied and variegated as Cameroonians. When I read over what I had written, it sounded rather familiar, and when I checked back issues of NO TRIFLING MATTER, I discovered that I had said it all before. Let the professor continue drinking whisky at Mvomeka's while Cameroon burns.

NO TRIFLING MATTER intends to wind up by the end of this year although, like a craft in flight, it will gradually taxi on the runway into 1994 before finally coming to a full stop. But one thing is sure. Book Two of THE PAST TENSE OF SHIT, including everything from the end of Book One up to the end of 1993, will be published. The chameleonic traitors who went and blew the whistle on Book One for it to be seized and got their reward can start getting to work to do the same for Book Two. We know them.

I once REMEMBERED NELSON on these pages. As I am writing this, a new Non-Racial Constitution is being signed in South Africa, bringing to an end 300 years! of white minority rule. Next Year, Nelson Mandela will come to power in South Africa. By the way, what happened to our *Large Débat*? When will Beti minority rule end in Cameroon? The answer is surely blowing in the wind!

Published November 24- December 1, 1993

A People Fit to Be Slaves

That is not the title of a novel or anything of the sort. The son of Gobata is not about to start trying his hand at fiction writing. I am talking about Cameroonians and Cameroon. “Cameroon is Cameroon,” as you very well know. What you may not have known yet is that Cameroonians are fit to be slaves. Quote me. The son of Gobata has never been known to engage in nasty jokes or to delight in mere play with words. The rulers of Cameroon are slaves of the devil (*akwaabvera satan*) and the rest of Cameroonians are slaves of these slaves of the devil.

A person who doesn’t know his own endowments and strength, who cannot distinguish between his own real, permanent interest and ephemeral palliatives and shibboleths; a person who rushes out like a chicken every time grains of corn are thrown on the turf by the very person who will soon ring its miserable neck, is fit to be a slave. With the GCE saga now behind us, it is really baffling, as the complete list of pirate markers is made available, to realize the number of otherwise decent Anglophones who were secretly involved in that nefarious exercise for filthy lucre’s sake. I even discovered that a distant relation of the Gobatas was secretly involved in the despicable exercise! As he is not well known around Yaounde and can manage French fairly well, he pretended being a Francophone. I felt like strangling him with my own hands when I realized his treachery. He pleaded poverty as the cause of his involvement. Anyone who doesn’t realize that it is much better to be poor in freedom and dignity than to be rich in bondage is fit to be slave.

One of the pretty ladies who was also secretly involved in the contemptible affair has been ostracized by her friends and acquaintances. She is reported to have recently attempted suicide by taking an overdose of valium. Of course, she was only seeking sympathy. Do you think anybody who really wants to die doesn't know what to do? Another pretender who deceived us into thinking that he was solidly with us but who was Mbella Mbappe's hireling has since been rewarded with a big post. All the unemployed graduate traitors have been rewarded with admission into ENS, Yauounde. Did you hear anything again about "studying files" before the list of admissions into ENS came out this year? All those admitted this year are children, relations and wards of members of the Presidential Majority and the GCE pirate markers.

A person who cannot stand up for himself at a crucial moment and who subverts his own long-term interests on the altar of momentary palliatives is fit to be a slave. A person who cannot bear present inconveniences for a better tomorrow will remain a slave forever. A person who, because of personal interest, is ready and willing to sacrifice the interest and well-being of a whole group of people of which he is a part is not only immoral but fit to be a slave. There is one of these young upstarts who was very friendly towards me until the day I severely criticized one of these *yeye* chiefs who, precisely at a time they were preparing to deal the final death blow to the GCE, went to congratulate Paul Biya for the marvels he had done for the GCE. The *yeye* chief' is related to my had-been "friend." Ever since, his smile towards me is no longer as warm or his handshake as firm as before. For some time, this fellow has been successfully running with the hare and pursuing with the hunters. What he failed to realize about the son of Gobata is that I will not hesitate to denounce my own twin brother if I am convinced he is a traitor.

Since 1987, the wreckers of our economy have never stopped talking about “*relance de l’economie*.” (Don’t blame Hon. S.K Nyoh for saying that we need to “Relance” our economy or Hon. John Tatah for saying that Aids is a terrible “Philomena”). But our economy has continued sinking until today when it is lying flat on its flat belly. No amount of frantic gymnastics can “relance” it (thanks S.K Nyoh). The simple reason is that those involved in the gymnastics are, in the first place, the very ones responsible for the crisis and, in the second, have neither the capability nor even the will to redress the situation. Do you know why Garga Haman Adjì cannot be allowed to speak in public anywhere? Last Friday, 19th November, Garga was once more brutally and forcefully prevented from speaking in public at Hilton Hotel under a regular programme organized by the *Le Messenger* group of newspapers, a programme that had previously already hosted Christian Cardinal Tumi.

Garga Haman has the proof that what members of this regime have swindled from public coffers can pay all our external debts and salaries for a number of years. After Fru Ndi, Garga Haman is the next person who needs a life insurance in this country. P.M. Achidi Achu has finally made bold to announce what *L’homme Courage* himself has not had the courage to announce since several months- another drastic salary cut! Courage is not a quality that is wanting in the Achus (Remember Achu Mofor?). Achidi announced the drastic salary slash with the jovial voice and attitude of a father announcing Christmas presents to the kids. The one-shift working day is the palliative and diversionary tactic. So something good can also come out of Southern Cameroons? What of those taxi owners they told us before would be angry if this system were introduced? You can take it from me, Rotcod, first son of Gobata, that, even if salaries are reduced to zero, the economy will not improve, as long as the present regime continues hanging on to power.

Had power changed hands in this country in 1992, as it should have, the economy would have picked up on its own and there would have been no need to retrench workers or reduce salaries. In 1991 and 1992 we missed two golden opportunities to “encourage” this disaster of a regime to give up power. Here comes another opportunity. It’s up to Cameroonians. If we miss this again, we are all fit to be slaves.

Published December 1-8, 1993

Beer Mungo! Beer Mungo!!

I shouldn't blame you if you promptly mistake that for an advert of a new liquor. Love of alcoholic liquors is one of the greatest legacies that His Excellency, Alhaji Ahmadou Ahidjo, though a Muslim teetotaller himself, bequeathed to Cameroonians before going to die in Senegal. NO TRIFLING MATTER is not about to start advertising beer at such a critical moment. I am only intoning a song which I hope would be taken up by all Cameroonians until its resounding echoes catch God's attention in heaven above from where, in the last three years, He has surely forgotten to glance towards Cameroon. We intoned this song before in both 1991 and 1992. But, on both occasions, our mouths were silenced with machine guns. This time around, it is likely that we have overcome fear of machine guns, hand grenades, truncheons and water cannon. Transcendence of fear is the beginning of wisdom!

Some two years or so ago, I had a serious argument with one of my Nigerian friends. He said that Cameroon is a small Banana Republic (which I considered an insult) and that Nigeria is the giant of Africa. I told him that Nigeria is an ugly giant and that, if they were such a giant, why have they never gone to the world cup? He then said that I was talking like a drunkard; that all of us, Cameroonians, are drunkards; that we are such good drunkards that our President is even called Mr. Beer (Biya). I corrected him that our President was now (or rather then) Dr. and not Mr. Biya, (thanks to the Americans of the University of Maryland, Eastern Shores). Then I remembered Manu Dibango who once composed a song entitled "Dr. Bird"

and wondered why someone could not compose one entitled “Dr. Beer.” But such a composition would have been short-lived since the man soon changed from “Dr, Beer” to “Professor Beer.”

But, between us, we must frankly admit one thing: Nigerians are a great people. All neo-colonialists know this very well. That is why, since independence, their invisible hands have always been there to divert Nigeria from the path of greatness, which could easily make it a formidable world-power. Do you think that, if Nigerians were not a great people, they would have succeeded in dislodging from the throne of dictatorial power Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, alias IBB, the Maradona of African politics? In Nigeria, the problem has been with the leadership, not with the people. In Cameroon, the problem is both with the leadership and the people.

Nigerians have always known where their collective interest lies and how to collectively struggle for it. In Nigeria, when a particular group is being oppressed or suppressed, the others don't fold their arms and watch because they know that tomorrow could be their turn. As recently as the mid-eighties, I was still a student in Nigeria. I remember one occasion when the Nigerian Government decided to introduce fees in the Universities. The students said “NO WAY” and rose up like one man to demonstrate under the battle cry ALI MUST GO! ALI MUST GO!! Ali was the Minister of Education who had suggested the fees. The entire population joined the students. Many, especially the illiterate, did not know what the protest slogan meant. All they knew was that that was the right thing to shout for the Government to reverse its “diabolic” decision. So what you heard everywhere was: ALI MUNGO! ALI MUNGO!! And it worked. Ali went and fees were not introduced. So, do you understand me now? You thought I was about to start advertising beer. Not on my life!

Cameroonians are still, understandably, in a state of shock following the recently announced salary cuts, the second within 12 months. I have once stated on this page that one of the fundamental flaws of Professor Beer's "New Deal" regime is sheer lack of a sense of proportion. In January when the first salary cuts, ranging between 20% and 40% came along, with tax increases of, in some cases 500%, we asked where else on earth a government could just wake up one morning and do such a thing and get away with it. We were assured that all the measures were aimed at redressing the economy in our own interest. And we yam-headedly believed them. The present cuts are up to 65% in some case! And we are being assured, once more, that the purpose is to redress the economy in our interest. What happened to the first redressing of the economy? If they were wrong then why would anybody think they are right now? It would be a great mistake for the jobless, the self-employed and those in the private sector to naively think that this is a problem for civil servants only. All hands must go on deck because it is our collective survival that is at stake.

And this time around, our action must not be directed at the secondary symptoms and effects. We must tackle the problem from the roots. The best way to deal with an illness is to attack the cause. The best way to cure malaria is to destroy both the parasite already in the blood and the mosquito which injects it. The "Confederation of Cameroon Trade Unions (CCTU)" has for once reacted like a Trade Union and given the Government an ultimatum for a general strike "in all sectors of activity" as from December 8th 1993. But its catalogue of demands is incomplete. It omits to demand that Beer and his pack of shameless kleptocrats must go. In fact, this should be the only demand for the present action. Let us first clear the rats from the barn before thinking of what to do with the little corn still left.

BEER MUNGO! BEER MUNGO!! Any dissenting voice?

Published December 8-15, 1993

Newsy Tit-bits

The death of President-for-life, Felix Houphouët Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire was announced on Tuesday, 7th December 1993. Did I get the name right? Any secondary school chap who can correctly pronounce and write that name at first attempt certainly has a bright future. The old man without a medal died at the official age of 88 after 33 continuous years in power as a (benevolent?) dictator. Everybody, however, knows that he died a centenarian (or is it centurion?). Nobody, however, knows exactly when he died. It is evident that he continued ruling at least for several days after dying. The death was only announced when it became quite clear that he could no longer continue with his *post mortem* rule. That is power for you in its African version.

Another African President-for-life who will surely die in office is His Excellency Kamuzu Banda of Malawi. His age is officially put at 90, which means that he clocked 100 several decades ago. He recently underwent a very delicate brain surgery in South Africa but rushed back to Malawi to recuperate and convalesce on his divine throne. Resolutely set on the same road as Boigny and Banda are their following comrades-in-absolute-dictatorial power: Eyadema of Togo, Biya of Cameroon, Mobutu of Zaire, Moi of Kenya and Bongo of Gabon. These are the "Does of Africa" about whom we have talked before in this column. The last mentioned in the series only recently organized his own masquerade under the euphemism "democratic presidential elections."

Yaounde is still breathing. Under kilotons of garbage (while the rest of the country bleeds?). And now, Jean-Baptiste Bokam, our own Hon. Minister, of...I forget! (With over 50 ministers, is it really humanly possible to remember all their names and pseudo portfolios?). Bokam is out with a powerful delegation to Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Benin to study how those wretched countries manage to dispose of their garbage. Don't laugh. I am not the one saying it. I heard it over the Radio. So these fellows are boldly admitting that they don't even know how to dispose of garbage. So what the hell are they doing sitting tight on jobs they can't do when thousands of capable Cameroonians are both willing and ready to do them? In "KEEPING YAOUNDE CLEAN" (CAMPOST, August 14-21, 1992) did the son of Gobata not ask these fellows to get the hell out of here so that more sensible and sensitive Cameroonians could start salvaging this country from their mess?

But these are people who fear neither God nor man and who have a sense of neither shame nor embarrassment. Have you seen the results of the latest opinion polls? Check them out in "*Challenge Mensuel*," of December 1993. John Fru Ndi is riding the crest of popularity among all sectors of society and all professions in all the provinces of our national territory. Paul Biya is uniformly right at the bottom of the popularity ratings. Even Kontchou Koumengni, whose logorrhoea or verbal dysentery cannot endear him to many Cameroonians, is several shades better on the opinion ratings than his master. But do you think that means anything to him? Have you heard him even cough since the strike of the civil servants brought the whole country to a virtual stand-still? He is calmly and quietly sipping his Chivas in Mvomeka'a. How else can a leader demonstrate utter contempt for the people he is leading? Come to think of it, the man is really a "*L'homme Courage*." He has guts!

In a recent Cabinet meeting of the New Deal's War Council, including all those Ministers, both prime and ordinary, who do Professor Biya's dirty jobs for him, they frankly admitted to themselves that the present nation-wide indefinite strike is the greatest challenge they are facing ever since they stole the people's victory over dictatorship in 1992. They noted that the strike is completely effective in all the Provinces except the East and South Provinces which, partly because of their remoteness, have not yet heard about the strike. I saw them sitting there with their heads half bowed like he-goats awaiting buyers in Ndu market. Some were furiously taking notes like journalists at a press conference. In the end they decided that their best strategy is to buy time by pretending to negotiate with the workers while geniuses like Kontchou are working out a knockout solution. Just watch. You will soon hear a widely publicized communiqué backed by CRTV camera pictures, of Louis Sombés, Secretary General of the Confederation of Workers Unions, shaking hands with the so-called Prime Minister and Head of Government, declaring suspension of the strike action "while peaceful negotiations continue."

Published December 15-22, 1993

I Spit on their Graves (In Advance)

You may live like a lion and die like a goat. You may reign like a King and end up like a slave. In that case, should we say that you were a lion which died like a goat or a goat which lived like a lion? Should we say that you were a king who died like a slave or a slave who lived like a king? Was Samuel Doe (yes, Master Sergeant Doe of Liberia) a great man who died like a scoundrel or a scoundrel who pretended to be a great man? The answer to all these questions is blowing in the wind; the answer is blowing in the wind.

About 5 years ago, I had an unusually vivid dream in which I saw His Excellency Professor Paul Biya stuffing his pockets and the space between his shirt and skin with the contents of a strong bag belonging to the entire community. He completely emptied the strong bag and it collapsed like a balloon from which air had been removed. All this time, God was sitting on his throne in heaven and watching and only smiling sardonically. I was infuriated at God's complicity and when His Excellency started walking away calmly and majestically as if there was no cause for alarm, I opened my mouth wide to shout but no sound came out. Then I heard God calling: "Son of Mvondo! Bi Mvondo! Son of Mvondo!... Biya!! But he pretended to be deaf and continued strolling away as if there was nothing the matter. Then God pointed his index finger threateningly at him. But he continued striding away in dumb show, without

looking back, as if not even a fly was making a noise. Then a strong blinding light came out of God's pointed finger and hit him on a spot, at the back of the head. The spot became immediately blighted. Up till today you can verify the bald spot like a permanent clerical tonsure, for yourself at the back of the head. Even cartoonists never fail to notice it.

But the fellow couldn't care less. And when he finally reached the midst of birds of the same feather, they hailed him, lionized and deified him. They said that God should go to hell; that their hero was now their god and they would worship him; that together they would reign forever and see what God could do to them. And so the hoodlums started a new religion of their own. Then God smiled again, sardonically, and said that he would never lift his finger to point at him again and that, if he ever did, that day he would be completely annihilated.

That is why when everybody was nearly panicking after the stolen victory of the October 11th Presidential elections, I said that we should all remain calm because God has not yet cast his own vote. God has not yet passed a verdict on those elections whose echoes and ripples have refused to fade away. But who can pressurize or hurry God in his actions? God's time is not our time and his actions can have both proactive and retroactive effect, if He so wishes. For three years, I've argued the case of the Cameroonian people against a formidable band of shameless hoodlums. Mine has been like the voice of one crying in the wilderness. But I marshalled overwhelming evidence and proved what had to be proved beyond a shred of doubt. Now, I rest my case in God's hands. Whether a greater than I is coming after me, I don't know. Wait and find that out for yourself.

We had promised that the struggle would continue until...WE SPIT ON THEIR GRAVES. And so it will. The voice may be still in the service of a meditative silence but purposive action will intensify. And when God's verdict is

finally pronounced in His own good time, we shall, at that point, only compile a full roll call of the scoundrels - a roll call of our national shame. But we can already, in advance, anticipate our moment of relief as we spit on their graves. May no Cameroonian womb ever again give birth to their kind! Amen.

Cameroon is a country firmly within the grip of Satan, the Devil. As we struggle to rescue this country from the Devil, we must cultivate infinite patience and make sure that we maintain a certain sense of humour all along the road. About this time last year, I spent "Christmas in Bagdad" under the state of emergency and had occasion to appreciate and remark the very healthy sense of humour among ordinary village folk who bear the brunt of the irresponsibilities of power. (see CAMPOST, December 29, 1992). At Nkar in Jakiri Sub Division, I met a villager with four dogs which he had named, respectively, Tsoungui, Fochive, Kontchou and Moutome. There is no way any stranger can enter his compound without his knowledge and consent! I really laughed off my head when the dogs were introduced to me and each one's chief characteristic described. The owner calmly told me: "With them around I sleep peacefully." What a terrific (or is it terrible?) sense of humour! Some West Cameroonians, of course, always say "terrible" when they mean "terrific." But that is not allowed in good *oyinbo*, by which I mean *Lam-barah*. The two words, in fact, have opposite connotations. I must find out from Mr. Peter Vakunta of the "Your English is Slipping" column whether using one in place of the other is a malapropism or a barbarism.

Without Prologue, the one and only son of Gobata appeared on the scene, causing neither a bang nor a splash. Without Epilogue, he eases out again before the curtain call. The malefactors may cry "good riddance!" forgetting that a *ngwerong* may retire to base only to reemerge as

kibarankoh.. Some may shed (crocodile?) tears. But, to them, I say: “Weep not for the son of Gobata; weep for yourselves and your children.” If you have been a faithful reader of NO TRIFLING MATTER, that in itself is no trifling matter. Now, join me this very moment in a serious ritual: SPIT ON THEIR GRAVES! *Nyamfookahs!!*

Published January 5-12, 1994

Epilogue

Those who went through the experience will never forget the moment when, in the evening of Friday, June 18th 1993, they arrived at the Social Centre of the Christ the King Parish at Tsinga in Yaounde for the public launching of the first volume of Rotcod Gobata's "No Trifling Matter" essays, published under the title *The Past Tense of Shit*, to discover that the venue, on holy ground, had been sealed by the political police on the orders of the Mfoundi Divisional Administration. In a letter addressed at the last minute to the author of the collected essays by the harassed, cowed and flustered Curate of the Parish, the latter explained that the permission which he granted for the use of facilities at the ceremony had had, painfully, to be withdrawn under intimidation and pressure from the police in whose opinion the occasion was bound to take a political character, "in view of the nature (sic) of the personalities who had been invited."

I had been invited to preside the ceremony a few weeks after the history making first All Anglophone Conference in Buea and still fewer weeks after my much noticed appearance on CRTV's "Actualité Hebdo" on 23 May 1993. Suddenly, in the eyes and mind of an intolerant regime whose best form of participation in public debate remains its suppression, I had become one whose "nature" would render political anything and any event with which I was associated. Earlier on that same day, the police in Douala had unlawfully seized a consignment of over six hundred copies of the book in the course of transportation by their

printer from Victoria to Yaounde, where they were expected to be used at the launching ceremony scheduled for that evening. More than a year later, as I write this *Epilogue* to the second volume of Rotcod Gobata's collected essays, that consignment is still held by the Douala police without explanation, without charges being brought against anyone, and at great financial and moral loss to the author and publishers of the book..

It is, therefore, a laudable act of courage and determination that Gobata and his publishers should decide now to release the second volume of these "No Trifling Matter" essays which, between December 1993 and June 1994, appeared in the pages of that indomitable standard-bearer of the people's fight for meaningful change in the Cameroon of Mr. Paul Biya, the *Cameroon Post*. By this gesture they affirm their refusal to be intimidated by a passing regime upon whose demise the political, economic and social survival of the Cameroonian Nation depends and towards whose early demise, therefore, all patriotic Cameroonians ought, each in his or her own way, to make a much-needed contribution. The Anglophone reading public in particular, and the Cameroonian people in general are indebted to the author and publishers of this volume for their tenacity in the fight for truth, human freedom and social justice in our country today.

The essays collected in this volume themselves are, by the depth of their analysis and the breath of their vision, indeed "No Trifling Matter." They are a chronicle of the events in contemporary Cameroonian society, especially as concerns the conduct of public affairs therein. Over and above its relevance for our own time, this chronicle will, in the decades that lie ahead, serve as a rich source of information, opinion and comment which future generations, anxious to understand the making of an era whose impact, positive or negative, is destined to survive

long after the longest-living of its principal actors and actresses shall have disappeared from the face of the Earth, will find a great benefit.

Rotcod Gobata has, through these essays, lit and placed on a pedestal, a candle whose flame shall never die and whose glow shall serve as a beacon to guide and to inspire generations yet unborn.

Dr. Simon MUNZU
Yaounde, 2 August 1994

“The essays collected in this volume are, by the depth of their analysis and the breath of their vision, indeed ‘No Trifling Matter’. They are a chronicle of the events in contemporary Cameroonian society, especially as concerns the conduct of public affairs therein. Over and above its relevance for our own time, this chronicle will, in the decades that lie ahead, serve as a rich source of information, opinion and comment which future generations, anxious to understand the making of an era whose impact, positive or negative, is destined to survive long after the longest-living of its principal actors and actresses shall have disappeared from the face of the Earth, will find a great benefit. Rotcod Gobata has, through these essays, lit and placed on a pedestal, a candle whose flame shall never die and whose glow shall serve as a beacon to guide and to inspire generations yet unborn.”

Dr Simon Munzu, Professor of Law, University of Yaounde II

Godfrey B. Tangwa was born in Nso, North West Region of Cameroon. He attended secondary school at St. Joseph’s College Sasse, Buea, and successively educated at the Nigerian universities of Nsukka, Ife and Ibadan. He lectured at the University of Ife, from 1978-1986, and joined the University of Yaounde in 1987 as a Senior Lecturer. He is currently Professor at the Department of Philosophy which he headed from 2004 to 2008. He is a member of the International Association of Bioethics, has served on its Board of Directors from 1997 to 2003, and was Vice-President of the Association from 1999-2001. He is a member of several academic associations and of many scientific and ethics review committees around the world. He is also a prolific writer and his publications in academic journals, magazines and newspapers span a wide range of issues.



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